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In the Shadow of the Purple



In the Shadow of the Purple

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PURPLE

A ROYAL ROMANCE

By

George Gilbert



London

John Long

6 Chandos Street, Strand

1902

"It is the history of two who fell in love long years ago."

PHILLIPS.

TO

THE MEMORY OF

SIR WALTER BESANT

PREFACE

It is a matter of infinite difficulty to obtain any details of the life of Mrs Fitzherbert, her personality is most elusive. She appears, from the very little that we know of her, to have been a singularly sensible and particularly unostentatious individual. The parade and self-advertisement that characterises most Royal mistresses was entirely absent. She did not mix herself in politics nor did she appear to have pushed herself forward. There is no showy charity bearing her name, she died worth less than thirty-five thousand pounds, she sat to no great painters, and even the town of Brighton does not possess a decent likeness of her.

My story is founded on fact, and nearly every incident in it has a historical basis, but I have cut and condensed my annals in places, which I believe (within limit) is an allowed privilege. The one imaginary scene of any importance is the interview in Chapter XXXVIII. I have avoided as much as possible the introduction of private personages whose names are not mentioned in the details of the life of this excellent lady already given to the public, and all my characters are well-known men of the day.

For the authenticity of the love-letters in Chapters V., VI. and VII. I cannot vouch. I believe them to be

forged. In them she speaks of her brother Frederick and the loss of her parents, but she never had a brother Frederick, and her father (presumably the period of the letters is before her marriage with the Prince) was alive. However, I give them for what they are worth. I found them in an old book in a Brighton library with those of other famous people. In the original all proper names were indicated by asterisks (* * *), and as far as I understood their series I have fitted the remaining letters in, as, otherwise, these might prove very tedious and almost unintelligible to a reader not deeply versed in the epoch.

I do not pretend or wish this to be thought a biography of Mrs Fitzherbert. It is put forth as a novel, founded on fact and written with the purpose of emphasising the essential particular that an illegal marriage did take place, and thus assist, however feebly, to refute some of the calumnious reports that still so persistently, so malevolently circulate. To show that Mrs Fitzherbert was a lady well-born and of good family, I give elsewhere, culled from Burke, particulars of her father and of the families she was in reality immediately connected with, which in themselves give the lie direct to a good half of the stories that malice tells.

The documents now lying at Coutts's Bank, sealed with the seals of the Duke of Wellington, the Earl of Albemarle and Lord Stourton, were preserved for the authoritative vindication of Mrs Fitzherbert's honour; but to that use the Duke of Wellington declined to allow them to be put. These documents are:—

Preface

1. The mortgage on the Brighton Pavilion.
2. The certificate of marriage, signed by both parties, December 21, 1785.
3. A letter relating to the marriage in the handwriting of, and signed George IV.
4. A will written by him.
5. A memorandum written by Mrs Fitzherbert, attached to a letter written by the clergyman who performed the marriage ceremony.

In conclusion, I wish to offer my sincere thanks to Mr J. G. Bishop, the editor of the *Brighton Herald*, who gave me great assistance in connection with this book.

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In the Shadow of the Purple

CHAPTER I

A PRETTY BOY

"And as through glass I view the windy world."

GIVEN a day in June warm and scented, harmonised with birds and jewelled with flowers; add to this the ever-lovely banks of the River Thames for a scene; crown all with youth, health, beauty and strength; given, I say, all these things and who could do aught but laugh with the sunshine?

There is no place half as sweet in its particular way as the river, it is so intensely English, and England at her very, very best; poets have sung of it, painters have painted it, and far more, countless thousands, have loved it. It is the most beautiful thing by far that London has. What are fine buildings in comparison to Nature? Besides, our fathers had it, our children will have it, it cannot decay nor crumble, it must always remain, gentle and in itself changeless.

On this particular June morning two ladies were walking along the river bank at the part where now you near the lock going down stream. It was quite early, not more than nine o'clock. The taller of the two was dressed in a simple flowered muslin gown, with a white kerchief over her breast and a big coarse straw hat on her golden, unpowdered hair. Ah, I have given myself away! The time I write of is not our present one. The news of our American disasters were but just to hand, with the unfortunate capitulation of Lord

Cornwallis, though, to balance it, there was the glorious victory of Rodney over De Grasse. Lord Rockingham was Prime Minister—to wit, it is the year of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and eighty-two.

The lady was of particularly graceful carriage, walking with a free, untrammelled air; her curving figure was well-nigh faultless; her hands and feet small and well-shaped. Her eyes were blue, her nose was slightly aquiline, giving, when her face was in repose, a somewhat imperious look, which was, however, obliterated when she laughed, or smiled; and she smiled often. All the same, her face never wore a meaningless, silly simper. The contour of her cheeks rounded to an oval chin and her lips were mocking.

Her companion merits less description. She was considerably shorter and of a bunchy shape, her face was round and good-humoured, her eyes were sharp and quick, her mouth was mischievous. Like her friend's, her dress was very plain.

"My dear," she exclaimed, suddenly breaking in a brisk voice on a temporary silence, "my heart really bleeds for you. I confess if I led so retired a life I should expire of *ennui*. Surely you do not intend to bury yourself for ever?"

"Not altogether 'bury' myself, Susie, dear, but I shall always live very quietly; it becomes a widow to do so."

"You will marry again."

"Never. Why, surely you would not advise a third venture when I have tempted Fate twice already; 'twould be flying in the face of Providence, indeed, which evidently intends me for a lonely life. I am happy as the day is long, child, so don't waste your pity on me. I have my work, my painting and my poor people—."

"A fine substitute for a husband and children—"

"I don't know Thom—"

"Oh, don't talk of him, Maria, I hate his very name, a strait-laced, stiff-backed—*Jacobite*."

Maria laughed. "That is an insult, I suppose, from your orthodox point of view."

Susie interrupted impetuously. "What you ever married him for I can't think. You could not have loved him, and

he has made you a heretic and disloyal to the King, and oh (if you could be so) horrid. Now Mr Weld—"

Her friend sighed. "Dear Edward. Yes, I did love him—really. With Mr Fitzherbert it was different, to have loved *him* would have seemed almost a liberty. Why did I marry him? you ask. Well, the poor man really loved me, and I was very lonely. We were happy enough."

"Yours was only a girlish infatuation for Weld," persisted Miss Fielding, turning, her honest affectionate eyes on her friend. "You are so pretty and altogether so dear. A great prince ought to come riding by, and— Oh!"

A crashing sound of breaking wood, and a great white horse came over the hedge and nearly into the river; the rider reined it up on its haunches, and then, turning a flushed and triumphant face over his shoulder, shouted, "Hurrah! I've beaten him."

The prancing hoofs were dangerously near, and Miss Fielding, uttering a second cry as she clung to her friend, brought their existence to the knowledge of the rider. He sprang like lightning to the ground, bare-headed and full of apologies. A well-built lad with a happy-go-lucky, imperious, devil-may-care face, brimming over with merry good-humour and half-repressed fun. He had a sensuous mouth, rounded chin, and appealing eyes. It was a lovable face, but one of contradictory features, the face of one unstable as water, weak as a woman, generous to a fault, brave, and yet morally a coward. He was very plainly dressed, and his own hair, brushed back from a well-shaped forehead, was neatly tied behind with a black bow.

Miss Fielding answered him, protesting her annoyance with herself for having screamed, whereat he renewed his protestations, and his eyes wandered from her to the beautiful face of her friend, who, after a slight curtsey, had turned away to the river. The young man, keeping a firm left hand on the bridle of his fidgety steed, seemed loath to go, and Miss Fielding busied herself with the soft nozzle of the animal.

"I protest," declared the equestrian, "I would have travelled miles, have done anything sooner than so unmannerly have startled you, ladies."

His words included both, but he did not look at Miss Fielding.

However, she alone replied. Then the thud of horses' hoofs were heard and the shouting of other approaching voices. The youth called aloud to them to wait, and, with another low bow, mounted, and in a flash had disappeared.

Two days later they met him again. It was what Miss Fielding had longed for and talked of ceaselessly ever since their first meeting, for she was greatly struck with his grace, youth and good looks. To her disgust, Mrs Fitzherbert had scarcely noticed him. "He was clumsy in frightening you, and I don't like young men; I hardly looked at him," she said.

Not so Miss Susie. She was a town mouse bored to extinction by the placid life of a country mouse, fond as she was of her friend. She had been peremptorily ordered to the country by the family physician as a remedy for the "nervous attacks" acquired in too much pleasuring; she now scented a possible intrigue and longed to see it further advanced.

So when, armed with needle-work and a small luncheon basket, they walked unexpectedly right on to the youth lolling on the grass with a book of poems, her bright, encouraging looks brought him at once blushing to her side. Their first unceremonious meeting set the conversational ball a-rolling, and Miss Fielding, with a nice discretion, kept it on the move, until they reached the little knoll where they made their headquarters.

"May I stay?" he asked ingenuously, but, as usual, his eyes were not on her, but beyond.

"Certainly," she answered briskly, unrolling her work, "but you must he useful. "My — sister" — her eyes sparkled with fun—"and I are working for charity—you shall assist our good intentions and read us extracts from that book you carry to enliven the monotony, while we work."

He looked pleased. "It is *Minna von Barnhelm*, but in the German tongue, you see," he said.

"I am fond of Lessing," declared Miss Fielding, composedly. "Are you not too, sister—Margaritta?"

Mrs Fitzherbert looked at her with a slight contempt in

her eyes and bowed her head slightly. She could not understand how coquetry is as the breath of life to some; never had her friend appeared to her in so unattractive a light.

"I will *make* her speak," thought the young man, determinedly. And he walked deliberately across and threw himself at her feet. She met this advance by drawing her skirts closer around her.

He was much mortified. "I will go, if you want me to," he said, for the first time speaking directly to her, "but," with a frank boyishness, "I would ever so much rather stay."

She looked at him more kindly. "I have no objection, Sir," she said graciously, adding, "I should be pleased to hear your book; the plays of Lessing were ever favourites of mine."

He read for some time, and he read clearly, dramatically and distinctly. When he was half-way through the third act Susie stopped him. "Enough," she said. "We must not exhaust you. Now, will you join us? My sister and I breakfast very early and then come here nearly ever day to get the pureness and coolness of the river air as we sew, and about this hour we partake of a repast, though I fear that I do but scant justice to it." There was a touch of satire, though a friendly touch, in her tone.

Mrs Fitzherbert took up the challenge. She let the soft flannel baby's shift fall on her knee. "I eat it all," she said mockingly. The young man was horrified. He swore by Venus and all the goddesses that a rose leaf, jewelled with dew, was most suitable food for her dainty lips and the nectar of the inhabitants of Olympus for a draught.

For the first time she laughed. "I for one should not be satisfied," she declared. Here Susie claimed his attention and kept him busy preparing the meal under her direction. He spread the white cloth on the grass, and while she fetched forth her viands drew the cork of the bottle of Madeira and filled three glasses.

"Here's to our friendship," he declared valiantly.

Mrs Fitzherbert shook her head. "You speak with the impetuousness of youth," she said. "Friendships are

difficult to make and easy to break, as you may have heard."

"I entreat of you not to regard everything in so serious a light, Madam," he said, "Life is very lovely."

"Yes, when you are young and have the world before you. My life is behind me, and existence stretches before me as the soft, even lapping of a placid brook. I hope I have exhausted my share of bitterness, as I think I have the most fervent of my happiness."

He looked up at her, tall and stately, sitting on the fallen boulder as though it were on a throne.

"You are built for great things," he declared. "You could live a great life and love a great love, you are worthy to be a queen, you look like a queen." He craned his head down and kissed her soft kid slipper. She drew her foot embarrassedly away, as Miss Fielding broke disgustedly in. Was he not her swain?

"You speak German very well, Sir," she said. "I am particularly conversant with that tongue and never heard any but a native with so pure an accent."

"My mother was a German," he said.

"So? Yes, it is slightly traceable in the pronunciation you give to the English language. Are you of the Court, Sir?"

"No!" he cried savagely. "I know nothing of Courts. I and my brothers live the life of novices in a nunnery."

Susie looked sympathetic, if not quite appreciative. "You can tell us, then, nothing of the King," she said conclusively.

"Oh, the King! He is as sternly just as ever. It is impossible to imagine he ever was young and that he had human hopes and fears. The Princes, I believe, are as wretched and as strictly looked after as usual."

Miss Fielding nodded her head.

"Poor young gentlemen, so cramped up! I am sorry for them, yes, from the bottom of my heart. Ah, when the Prince of Wales comes of age—"

"Madam," he said, "your sympathy is exquisite. You may rest assured when the Prince of Wales *does* come of age—well, things will be very different. If he develops into a bad man, if he is detested and reviled, if he passes his days and nights in wildest profligacy and goes down to

posterity as a worthless villain, the King will deserve more blame than he will get. It is not possible for a man to live the life of a bloodless fish, a Quaker's life, which is what the King wishes."

"He would admire it," agreed Susie, and then laughed.

The young man was embarrassed; evidently his tongue had carried him farther than he intended. "We must not believe half we hear of Royalty," he declared lamely. "Now the King—"

Here he received the most unpleasant shock he had ever felt in his life, for the cold, stately divinity he knew only as Margaritta let fall this thunder-bolt. "The King is in Rome, I believe; I suppose you and this young gentleman are talking of the Elector of Hanover."

Susie was indignant. "I wish you would keep your nasty, seditious, heretical notions to yourself," she cried petulantly. "Years ago you loved the King and hated the Pretender. Besides, did other than this gentleman hear—It is highly dangerous."

Mrs Fitzherbert smiled indulgently.

"Let us say Prince Charles Edward," she said.

"Yes," said the young man, giving her an unexpected support, "by all means. I pity that unfortunate man from the bottom of my heart, though I fear I shall never muster strength of self-sacrifice enough to abdicate in his favour. I speak as though I was going to be—as though I were King," he added hastily.

"A Papist!" cried Susie, horrified.

"Why not? I suppose I am not the devotee of the orthodox religion I should be, I fear I am not. I have had so much of it all my life."

"Love of the beyond comes only with trouble and a ceasing absorption of interest in this life," said Maria, with sweet seriousness. "I trust, Sir, if dark days overtake you, that you will find true comfort in contemplating the divine, even if now you are sickened by the formal conventionalities that more or less surround the best of religions. Our prayers are not prayed to stay in the Church you know, we hope they reach beyond. A file of soldiers are as conventional as our most familiar and oft-repeated prayers.

Yet there are a thousand different emotions stirring within their several hearts beneath the precision of their uniform tunics, and so under the livery of our repeated prayers, if I may so put it, our human wishes go up. It is the soldier fights, you know, not his red coat. We hope our prayers fight for us equally under their sameness and repetition."

He listened with great attention. "'Tis such arguers as you," he cried, "that are required at, that do good at a frightened death-bed."

She blushed. "I have talked too much," she said; "it is too often the fault of an ignorant woman. Forgive me, Sir. And now"—she rose to her feet—"we must leave you. Thank you for much pleasure derived from your reading."

"We shall meet again?" he said, as he kissed her hand.

"Possibly."

"When? Where?"

"We make no appointments, Sir, we may meet by accident as to-day beside the stream. But we know not your position, name or rank."

"Let us keep it simple, rustic, Arcadian," broke in the romantic Susie. "You shall call me Lily—which is one reading of my name—my sister Marguerite, which is the French rendering, as you know, of our ox-eyed daisy. And what shall we call you?"

"I would rather you called me by my own Christian name which is George," he said.

"A patriotic name," declared Susie, intent on annoying her friend.

"I was born the same day, the same hour as the eldest son of—the—Elector," said the young man, with apologetic meekness.

"No reasons for you to be an admirer of his," said Mrs Fitzherbert.

"I am far from an admirer, Madam," declared the young man, readily.

On the third of these innocent meetings an indignant gentleman broke in upon them.

It was a quick, retributive justice, for the lad had but just been chuckling at the fact that his tutor believed him to be

studying. "I tell him that I do not feel well and cannot work fast," he said.

"But it is not true!" said Mrs Fitzherbert.

He laughed again, though not so freely. "Ah, how cruel it is, ladies, that the humblest of your slaves should be put to such shifts to bask for a while in the radiant sunshine of your smiles. I have brought Shakespeare, let us have the English tongue to-day; he, you said, was a poet that had your admiration."

"If you please," she said, and sighed.

And just then down the path came the indignant elderly gentleman panting for breath. He was followed by another who appeared his subordinate.

"Oh, wicked! base! ingrate!" he cried to the young man whose name was George. "How dare you forsake your tasks and stray away like a—like a—"

"Like a flock of sheep, egad, and you the shepherd and Arnald there the dog—he looks a dog, he had better be careful he is not a whipped one."

"I want none of your insolence, Sir, nor does my friend the worthy doctor. To find you here alone with these—painted drabs—"

"Silence, you old fool, or I'll throw you in the river."

Mrs Fitzherbert dropped her work and caught the lad's clenched fist with her left hand, her right she laid with a soothing pressure on his shoulder. "Go with him," she said softly. "You must not mind what he says, he is excited and so are you. He has a right to expect obedience, it is not for ever, you know. Go quietly for my sake." His hand dropped at his side.

"I can refuse you nothing, Madam," and, turning, he kissed her hand.

"We shall meet again," she told him, nodding and smiling with bright reassuringness.

"It is unlikely," said Mr Hurd, sourly, for the victory had not been his.

"It is the most perfect truth," said George, warmly. "We meet again some day, Madam. I will search the world wide for you." He kissed Miss Fielding's hand with a simple grace and went quickly with one of the two

gentlemen on each side like jailers. Ere the bend hid him, he looked back an instant bare-headed and then vanished from sight.

Susie sat down and laughed. "Oh, la! la! what a coil," she said.

Mrs Fitzherbert did not laugh, but stared in front of her. "A pretty boy!" she said, and then repeated "A pretty boy, and they are ruining him with that sort of thing. What a pity! I wonder who he is?"

CHAPTER II

THE TUTELAGE OF THE GREAT

"A something more than brothers—fiercest friends."

THE unwilling captive walked along with a frowning brow, his head held firmly in the air, his mouth set. On his right Mr Hurd continued to break the silence with cold sarcasm, obviously intended to rouse his pupil's anger, and on his left Dr Arnald was equally irritating to one in his mood with soft, soothing persuasion.

Nearing the Queen's House, they suddenly met the King. He was not then forty-five and was still fairly young-looking. He was inclined to corpulency, and his face was steely cold. With him was his second son, the Bishop of Osnabrück (created such by the King at the age of seven months to the annoyance of the Chapter at Cologne), and Lord Essex.

"How now?" he exclaimed. "What is this?" He markedly addressed Mr Hurd and ignored George, his son.

The gentleman addressed began to explain plausibly, when the King interrupted,—

"Surely, Mr Hurd, you must know the Prince too well now to trust him," he suggested; "and that you need, to control him, constant watchfulness."

Mr Hurd murmured something of "trusting to his honesty."

"A rotten reed, Sir," declared the King, then he turned to his son. "I shall not demand your attendance this evening," he said. "And I would recommend that you stayed in your apartments twenty-four hours to realise your

conduct." He was moving on and then paused. "What are you doing in a wig?" he queried sharply. For, since that first meeting, the lad had endeavoured to make such alterations in his dress within his limited power as would render him smarter, more manly and less boyish. Now he scowled at the question.

"I am subject to cold, the doctor has ordered it," he answered sullenly.

"In June?" asked the King. Then he turned to Lord Essex. "A lie is ever ready when it is wanted," he said cuttingly. "Come, Frederic."

At ten o'clock that night Prince Frederic might have been seen, with bare feet, in his night-shirt, stealing along a dark passage lit irregularly with patches of white moonlight; he carried a bundle of clothing. Stopping in the darkest place, he tapped very softly and cautiously on a dimly visible door. Somebody stirred within.

"It's me," whispered he in answer to a request to "*Zum Teufel gehen.*" "Let me in."

"The door's bolted outside," growled the captive. "Curse them, curse everyone!"

The younger brother very gently, and with infinite care, coaxed these precautions back, and, softly as a mouse, slipped into the room with his bundle.

"Egad, it's a filthy shame," he declared, with boyish reticence and yet an awkward attempt at condolence, as from the mysterious roll he produced two bottles of brandy. "I've brought some clothes, but I suppose you'd better not slip out to-night?"

The Prince of Wales was sitting up in bed with his arms disconsolately wound round his knees. "Hotham's locked up every rag I have," he declared savagely.

"Why didn't he lock the door?" asked Prince Frederic, with real interest, as he wound a cloth round the neck of one of the bottles to muffle the chink, previous to knocking it off with the butt of a pistol.

The victim amongst the pillows showed faint complacence. "I broke the lock last week myself," he explained, "and so skilfully no one knew, till he tried to lock it to-night. Haven't you got any water?" as Frederic approached the

bed to administer spiritual consolation. "It is monstrously burning, raw."

The hopeful Bishop shook his head. "If you've none here. I had a terrible business to get this, all I could. Old screw, he charged ten shillings a bottle. God knows how much we owe him. What have you got?"

"Nothing."

"I've got a pound. It's been due three days, haven't seen it yet, though." For, impossible as it may seem, these two young men, sons of the King and one his heir, were allowed to spend each—one pound a week!

"Perhaps Uncle Cumberland will fork out in a week or two," suggested George, in would-be hopeful tones. "Meanwhile, oh, I have such news for you!"—he sighed sentimentally—"I'm in love."

"Perdita—" began Frederic, wearily.

"Damn Perdita! No, the most beautiful—"

The brother interrupted. "And I've news for you too. It's no good talking about what we shall do in a week or two," mournfully, "because—I am going to Hanover at once."

George drew a long breath. "You lucky dog!" he exclaimed.

The Bishop seeing that his brother was unselfish enough to congratulate him, dropped his woe like a cloak. "*S'ist wahrhaftig prächtig*," he declared, his face beaming with unchecked smiles.

"To get away from—all this. To be *free*—your own master! But me, oh, Fritz, what will become of me?"

He was very affectionate, this boy whose life gave so much promise and was yet such a hideous failure. His wail of misery was very genuine. Later he implored the King, his father, not to separate him from his brother, but to let him go too. He promised everything, and it was no light, easy humbling of his pride to ask a favour thus of the man whom, he felt, hated him, the man who, when in honest solicitude, he hurried to his side (even if it was in disobedience surely there was enough excuse) during the Lord George Gordon riots of a year before, had met him angrily, and with foolish insolence and childish tyranny had

punished his nineteen-year-old son for his filial devotion as though he were a child of twelve.

The King was adamant. The bitter day came; the brothers who had all their lives been together, for there was only a year and four days between them, and who had always had the same interests and pleasures, were separated for seven long years, and this unfortunate youth, on the dawn of manhood, was thrown completely back on himself with no rational employment, a supervised liberty, and limited, carefully-counted means. The natural result was that he formed illicit, secret friendships with some of the most notorious characters of the day. Men who were absolutely independent of the King, and expressing his own feelings and dislike so heartily, were to him such a delightful novelty! And is it any wonder? Before he was formally emancipated, and while he was in strict leading-strings, he had adopted a life of deceit which was a disgrace more to his father than to himself. He would steal out and run up to London, six miles away, while he was supposed to be innocently sleeping, and join there in the wildest orgies with the most disreputable companions. It was his safety-valve from the restrictions of the day. A particularly disgraceful fact in connection with this was that his uncle, who had a spite against the King, encouraged him; when a few words of prudence would have been invaluable; for he was a favourite with his nephews. The result was that when the Prince came of age, he had already a handsome crop of debts, an encumbrance he was scarcely ever without during his whole life, though he died free from debt at last. Parliament suggested an income of £100,000 a year, but this was quickly vetoed by the King, chiefly because the proposal came from the brains of Charles Fox. "£50,000" said he, "was quite enough." Possibly it might have been for a piece of iced virtue like himself. The King was a Tory of Tories, and in opposition the Prince at once allied himself to the Whigs, admitting their shining light, Charles James Fox, to his intimate friendship, and allowing himself to be tutored in politics by that brilliant genius.

There was a lady, she is well known to history, who was

one of the most active of the indirect political powers, and she was the flower of Whigdom, Georgiana, the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, Fox's ardent devotee. In a flash she saw the grandest of chances for her side, and exerted all her charm, all her power and all her influence to bring it to a successful issue.

The Prince took no interest whatsoever in politics. That was good. The lady did not worry nor bore him with them, not at all, she judiciously "nursed" him, prepared for unforeseen climaxes on every hand. Her house was ever the most delightful he knew, her friends were witty and distinguished, and flatteringly submitted their clever brains to his callow advice. Without making love to him, she insinuated herself completely in his life. Her taste it was that displayed itself when, in the autumn of '83, Carlton House was first redecorated. Already she skilfully manœuvred him, wherever his presence would advertise the Whigs.

About that time also she introduced to his notice a very bluff gentleman indeed. "The wittiest man in London," who very soon gained remarkable ascendency over his boyish, impulsive heart. Of medium height, with full lips, humorous eyes, not particularly handsome, but intensely interesting, Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan —the 'Sherry' of so many a delicious joke and oft-repeated tale which are not yet stale though a hundred years old, and think what a long time a hundred years is—was then in his thirty-second year.

He came; he was seen, and he conquered. The extraordinary friendship that sprang up, like a mushroom, in one night, is what one would expect in a wild, untutored boy.

Mr Sheridan at once offered to "show him a little life." Is there any young man going who could have resisted? The "life" consisted in one instance of the Prince, Lord Surrey, a friend of Fox, the son of the Duke of Norfolk, and Dick himself going in a hackney-coach, the two first thrilling with delicious excitement, to a tavern of not particularly sweet repute, kept by one Mother Butler, to wit the "Salutation," Tavistock Court, Covent Garden. The romance of the expedition was enhanced by feigned

names, a suggestion of Sheridan's, who most decidedly ought to have known better. George was Blackstock, Lord Surrey, Greystock, whilst their leader reserved for himself the cognomen of Thinstock. Arrived, they changed quickly into countrymen's smocks, such as were seen frequently in that district on the backs of those coming from long distances with vegetables for the market. They were further disguised with false beards and armed with stout cudgels. They issued forth in search of adventure, viz., a fight. The Prince had quarrelled with no man except his father, but he longed with the quick bubbling up of young blood to pummel someone. He had been instructed by Angelo, his fencing master, in pugilism, and he wanted to give his powers an honest trial. A chance almost immediately occurred. Two stolid "Charlies" were hauling along a young, good-looking woman, apparently of the unfortunate class. Surrey gave a sort of war whoop. "A damsel in distress," he exclaimed, with joy, then quickening his pace, 'Hi! fellows! release that lady!"

The watchman turned a heavy head. "Lady!" he ejaculated and then something else that would not look pretty in the print of the twentieth century.

"Let her go at once!" cried George, authoritatively, "or you will be made to." Still neither man made a belligerent answer, they were evidently anxious to escape the quarrel, so, with exemplary mildness, the latter said,—

"Let us be, young man, it is nought of yours."

"Oh gentlemen, I entreat you!" cried the woman, hopefully, having a strong objection to Bridewell. She wrenched round her manacled hands.

"You'd jib, would you, you drab?" said the other representative of the law, and he tapped his prisoner sharply on the cheek. Before he knew where he was, "Blackstock" had knocked him down.

Then the fun started. True, they were three to two, but then the watch were big, sturdy fellows, and fighting back to back the affair became excitingly even. The woman, standing apart, urged on her defenders in heart-felt tones, and when they wavered gave a cry of dismay that chivalrously encouraged them to still more earnest endeavours. Then

Mr Sheridan got one home with such advantage that the shorter man hesitated, stumbled, and fell, and in a trice Mr Sheridan was kneeling on his chest pinioning him with the piece of rope dragged in his excitement none too gently from the girl's own wrists, whilst she herself stuffed her handkerchief into his mouth and tore up her petticoat to bind his legs.

They looked round and saw the remaining foe vanish round the corner to the triumphant shouts of "Blackstock" and "Greystock."

"Let us go at once," said Sheridan quickly. "He will bring help."

"Gad! I'm not afraid!" cried the young Prince, his blue eyes sparkling from the intense enjoyment of his first fight. "Are you, Jock—I mean Greystock?"

"No, Sir, I know that," persisted Sheridan. "But if you are caught—"

"They can't harm me."

"I know;" but there will be no more little excursions like this, except with infinite difficulty."

"Then let us go at once," he said.

"Yes, let us go" cried the woman, feverishly. She turned her head. The gagged man was thirstily straining his ears for every word. In an instant she plucked off the handkerchief that was round Surrey's neck and stepping across spread it over his eyes. "He cannot now see which way we go," she whispered. So they trod softly through the ousy mud till out of earshot.

"Now, quick!"

They could hear voices faintly in the distance. "Run," ordered Sheridan. The brisk short legs of young Howard led.

"I can't keep it up," panted the woman.

"Poor little thing!" She was a small woman and the Prince tucked her under his arm as though she were a child, and he scarcely felt any difference in his glorious young strength as he bounded on to the "Salutation."

Arrived there, the woman told her story. To Sheridan it was highly improbable. Surrey was sceptical, whilst the Prince believed every word of which the girl kept on protesting the truth.

In the Shadow of the Purple

She said she was the daughter of an Oxford attorney, and had been ruined under the promise of marriage, by "the son of a nobleman"; her father had turned her out of the house, and when later, she had been driven from necessity to ask his help, he had ordered her, with curses, from his door. Nay, further, he had bidden his servant throw her out, only the servant, better hearted than himself, had not only declined *in toto*, but had even given her five shillings from his own pocket, for which act he had been promptly dismissed. She did not know where he was now.

"If I could find that man," cried the Prince, "he should be rewarded a thousandfold."

At his entreaty they took her with them to Orchard Street, where Mrs Sheridan, the pretty "Cecilia," waited the coming of her liege lord in a dainty peignoir. She was told something—probably she guessed the rest, but tinged with Bohemia, she made no bones and took the wanderer in.

To make a long story short, the tale proved true. The girl was provided for, greatly at the Prince's expense. In the end she married. Roberts, the servant was found. He was then reduced to a state of penury almost as bad as his young mistress was when he had given her, for him, the lucky five shillings. He entered the Prince's employ and remained his confidential servant for thirty-five years, in fact, until his death. But there are other less creditable stories about the Prince.

To change the sign-boards of every inn in the town of Brighthelmstone so that the "King's Head" bore the name of the "Royal George" and the "Red Lion" blossomed as the "Goat and Compasses," was only boyish mischief. It was not so reputable as to take a man, who was in reality a pugilist, dressed as a bishop, to some public gardens, where, after getting gloriously drunk, he proceeded to smash everything, and in the end to make a wide, respectful circle and gaily wipe the floor with all comers.

The modern teetotal fiend is of later date, but there was many a crank full of opinion on the use of "spirituous liquor," and it was a happy idea of Major Hanger, a friend

of the Prince's (accompanied by him and other choice spirits), to plant the whole garden of a particularly bombastic spirit with a bold, handsome design in empty bottles, over which three wobbly curls (for they had no false modesty about disguising their handiwork) to represent feathers, proudly supported each other. On one unfortunate person who had inspired their enmity (one version of the story makes it Pitt), seventy-two tailors called one day for the first fitting on of a suit of clothes they brought with them, which they alleged to have been ordered!

With the Prince's smooth face, surrounded by a dainty cap and the rest of him in female habiliments, a select party, captained in this case by the wildest of the whole lot, Lord Barrymore, a handsome youth of a piercing, Jewish type of beauty, over six feet high, whose mad doings—although he was under twenty-one—had already gained him the unflattering soubriquet of "Hellgate," drove at a gallop in a hackney-coach down a populous street, and "Help, help! Murder! Let me go!" was heard from within in shrill female tones. The ire of those who, with infinite difficulty, had run after and stopped the vehicle on discovering the "girl" of course, knew no bounds.

A bet, too, was made at Carlton House between the Prince and Major Hanger against Mr Berkeley; it was for £500 on the subject of the superior travelling powers of the turkey over the goose. To decide the matter, a race was arranged for ten miles, and the Prince and Major Hanger with twenty turkeys, and Mr Berkeley and his party with twenty geese, set off to decide the match. For the first three hours everything seemed to indicate that the Prince was going to win, for his flock was over two miles in advance of the geese, but the night began to fall and then the turkeys began to eye the trees at the side of the road. Coming to a little clump, in a body they took wing and landed on the branches. "In vain" says the historian of the tale, "did the Prince attempt to urge them with his guiding pole, to which a piece of red cloth was attached, in vain did Major Hanger dislodge one or two, only to see others settle comfortably in the foliage. Even

barley strewn on the road proved no temptation for the fowls to descend. Quack, quack! the geese came along but too soon, and their guiders shouted triumphant and bitter victory to the turkey-ites, who were frantically attempting to coax—driving was useless—their rebellious birds to descend. They at last abandoned their efforts, which were absolutely unavailing, and Mr Berkeley was declared to have won. The Prince paid with a good grace. Had he seen Mr Berkeley hand over half the money, £250, to Major Hanger for having arranged the matter, he surely would have felt that he had paid dearly for his defeat.

And of Major Hanger, later we have another and still more disgraceful tale.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE

"Come, lad, out with it! Is it a debt or a wench?"

In the year 1783, in the month of January, the celebrated coalition of Mr Fox and Lord North, rabid Whig and rabid Tory, began to be freely whispered about. On the 2nd of April an administration was formed of which the Duke of Portland was the nominal head and the new allies the real.

The coalition would not have been one quarter so unpopular nor so condemned as it was, but for the weight of the King's dislike being thrown in the balance against it, for he hated Fox, his hatred dating back to the clandestine marriage controversy thirteen years before. So great was this loathing that when Fox's India Bill was to be read in the House of Lords a second time, a note was privately circulated by Lord Temple, written in his Majesty's own hand, stating, "That he would deem those who voted in favour of the Bill as not only not his friends, but his enemies."

A nine days' scandal was created by the Prince of Wales marching as a proud ornament of the Whig peers, but the Bill was defeated by a majority of eight. On the night of the 18th of December his Majesty uncerimoniously dismissed his Ministers, and in due time the immaculate William Pitt blossomed into Prime Minister at the age of twenty-five, ripened thus early by the sun of the kingly smile. Generosity to a fallen foe was now conspicuous by its absence. It was not enough for the King and the young haughty premier, who had entered the House as a follower of Fox's, that the Whig party were defeated in the general election, and it

nearly broke the great Whig's heart when the country was thus deciding against him. They resolved to exclude him from Parliament altogether, at any cost to prevent his re-election for Westminster, which he had represented for four years. To put it mildly, it would have been decent of Mr Pitt to remember that just after his first success in the House, some time in March '81, his name was put up at Brookes's by the man who could surely have never had an enemy, Fox himself. And yet Court influence, and even the King's name, were freely used. The Government went the length of sending two hundred and eighty Guardsmen to vote against him.

The Prince in this did not desert his friend; he was with him hourly, using every influence he possessed in his favour. For the Whigs had sworn that Fox should *win*.

There were two seats for Westminster. Sir Cecil Wray, originally nominated by Fox, late a Whig, held one—but he was a renegade, having fallen a willing victim to Tory wiles—and Admiral Lord Hood arrived to capture, if he could, the other. At first, the two ministerial candidates were in the decided majority, but this only made the Whigs set their teeth more firmly.

The Westminster election always took place at Covent Garden, the "Shakespeare" was the tavern where Fox's committee met.

Going thither the third day from St James's Street, where his lodging was, Fox found his advance was opposed by a disorderly gang dressed as sailors (they were afterwards proved to be hired ruffians who had never smelt sea air) near Charing Cross, shouting "Hood for ever!" So threatening was their aspect that he was compelled, greatly against his inclination, to take refuge in a private house. He was no coward, but now feared assault more than anything, inasmuch that if he were only temporarily laid up at that stage of the proceedings, it would be fatal to his already slender chance. Heartfelt was his relief when, having escaped by a side door, he arrived where he was so anxiously expected. The most influential of his supporters were all assembled. An unequal gathering: Mr Sheridan, Lord Surrey, Colonel Gardner, the

Prince of Wales's private secretary, for Carlton House inhabitants, one and all, wore the blue and buff. The Prince himself anxious, and yet boyishly enthusiastic. Many humbler friends of Fox were there too.

The room was full.

He strode in the personification of wrath, his black eyebrows meeting in a thick, bushy line. "It is disgraceful, infamous!" he cried, agitatedly pacing up and down after a few brief sentences of explanation. "I behave honestly and fairly to them. To-day was an organised plot."

"Worse than the 28th of March in '71?"

"Infinitely. From the plebs. you know what to expect; they know no better."

One of his supporters, Mr Crewe, came bursting into the room. "There are more sailors collecting round the hustings. They are forcing the voters off!" he cried excitedly, "in the King's name!"

"And my father countenances such things!" exclaimed the Prince, with tears of impotent rage in his eyes. "Charles! oh, it is not my fault." He came across and seized the hand of his friend.

"What, you here?" said Fox, with absent kindliness. "That should not be, you know."

"I could not stay away. Oh, you *shall* win."

"Yes, yes!—" A stone came crashing through the window, a confused babel was heard outside.

"There is a lady dismounting from her chair!" cried someone from the window. Curses and cheers, groans and hurrahs came floating up. The Duchess of Devonshire appeared in the doorway. "Thank God, you are safe!" she cried, heeding no one else, as Mr Fox moved to meet her. "I heard a report you were killed."

His moody face and dark eyes softened in an instant. "Your Grace is infinitely good to take an interest in me," he declared formally.

The Duchess drew a sharp breath, curtsied to the room and was herself again. "We are not going to let ourselves be beaten," she declared cheerily, shaking out her blue and buff skirts, the Fox colours. "I am going to canvas myself—oh, yes, I am. Then—we'll see!" She gave

a coquettish little push to the big black hat we all know so well. "Mr Sheridan, you will oblige me vastly by saying what is our biggest card?"

"The tax on maid-servants, Madam," returned he, unhesitatingly. Then, quoting from a doggerel current:—

"'For though he opposes the stamping of notes,
'Tis in order to tax all your petticoats.
Then how can a woman solicit votes
For Sir Cecil Wray?'"

For, although the "sailors" were ostensibly in the interest of Lord Hood, the Foxites knew already that his election was pretty certain, and their real enemy was the turncoat Sir Cecil, unflatteringly dubbed by them Judas Iscariot.

"And what do you think of the tax, Mr Sheridan?" persisted the lady.

"Madam, I can regard it in no other light than a bounty to bachelors and a penalty upon propagation."

Two more stones came through the window, one of them shaving within an ace of Colonel Gardner's head. Somebody's startled exclamation reached below and a cheer came up.

"They are trying to swarm up to the window," cried the watchman, Harry Fox, from his coign of vantage wrapped in the window curtain.

"Gad's life, this is not to be borne!" cried Fox. Then someone else came to say the door below was likely to be burst in. "I will harangue them from the window—"

"What madness!" cried Sheridan, "'twill incite them further."

"I must have some friends there."

"Your friends will come and vote, Charles, never fear, but they are far too respectable to stay longer than they are obliged in company with those dirty scoundrels."

The truth was, the mob, having visited Westminster without meeting their prey, and having searched the Strand, had returned, vindictive and angry, to swell the crowd outside.

"They must be cleared off," said Fox, decidedly.

"Come, Sherry, you will back me, I know; Surrey, Colonel Gardner—"

"What are you going to do?" asked the Duchess, nervously.

"Beat those vagabonds off, egad!" he returned excitedly.

"And I'm with you," shouted George, a gallant young figure in his new 10th Dragoon uniform; he half drew his sword.

"No, Sir," said the other, firmly. "You came here to-day at great risk, and, kind as it was of you and deeply as I shall ever feel it, I wish to Heaven you were elsewhere than thus exposed to discovery and insult. If they saw you—"

"It would do the cause good. They would see that I at least was on the right side."

"If it were known it would alienate you still more from the King your father. I can never thank you enough for your friendship and support during this most trying time for me, but I am not going to let you suffer."

"If you go, I am going with you."

"Sir, I entreat you not to add to my anxieties. If only you and the Duchess were away I—" But the shouting without had become a deafening uproar.

"Take that, you —— crature!"

"There's one for Charlie!"

"You dhirty low blayguarrd!"

Rescue had arrived. The hackney chairmen, a numerous body, chiefly Irish, and Foxites to a man, had banded together and marched down to his protection, and they quickly sent the enemy running, though many of them were armed with bludgeons. There were, however, several arms, legs and ribs broken and one or two cases of fractured skulls. The "sailors" afterwards gave the "Shakespeare" a wide berth, though next day they marched to St James's Street with the intention of breaking up the chairs, but Ireland in this second fight was triumphant.

I have not space to tell of all the devices used on either side. Fox's spirits kept up wonderfully, he was serenely confident all through, if you can trust to the diary he kept at the time.

The particular charges against Wray were ingratitude to

Fox, the obnoxious tax on maid-servants, a desire to abolish Chelsea Hospital, and, most important of all, backstair influence. But "the Man of the People" fought nobly. The Prince himself was said to have canvassed, and we have all heard how indefatigably the Duchess worked, and the celebrated story of her buying the butcher's vote by permitting him to kiss her cheek, an act that called forth the severest comments from the Tories, though the Duchess of Gordon, Pitt's great support, did the same thing later when recruiting for the Gordon Highlanders. The abuse, the coarse squibs and indecent caricatures that were showered on her were shamefully cruel and unjust.

On the 10th May a party of constables were brought from Wapping by one Justice Wilmot. They went about shouting "No Fox!" and insulting and impeding the Liberal voters. Then they hung about in the neighbourhood of the hustings, and just as the poll closed a slight disturbance gave them an excuse for an attack. But, as before, a rescue came, for a multitude of butchers and brewers swept round the corner, the sound of marrow bones and cleavers filled the air, a free fight again ensued in which one man was killed, and a body of Guards had to be requisitioned in the end to quell it. The poll closed and Mr Fox was in by a majority of two hundred and thirty-six votes!

A caricature was immediately published representing the unfortunate "Judas" being driven forth by a maid-servant's broom and a pensioner's crutch, and a highly popular broadside ballad ran:—

"Sir Cecil, be aisy, I won't be unshivil,
Now 'the Man of the Paple' is chose in your stead.
From swate Covent Garden you're flung to the Divil,
By ——, Sir Cecil, you've bodder'd your head.

Ah, now pray let no jontleman prissent take this ill,
By my truth Pat shall never use unshivil warruds.
But my varse, sure, must plaise which the name of Sir Cecil
Hands down to oblivion's latest recarruds.

If mysilf with the tongue of a prophet was gifted,
Oh, I say in a twinklin' the knight's latter end!
Towards the varge of his loife devilish high he'll be lifted,
And after his death, ne'er fear, he'll decind."

The Man of the People

When the result was known, Fox was carried in a chair adorned with laurels through the chief streets of the West-end and into the wide, open gates of Carlton House, where a great supper was given that night in his honour.

"You have won!" said the Duchess, with a catch in her voice, when he came back from haranguing the crowd now madly cheering outside. She was flushed and excited, and the red of her hair gleamed where the powder was brushed from it.

"Yes," he said softly, "thanks to you, I have won. How to thank you I do not know. It would have been bitterer than death to me to have lost."

"Oh, I know it all. But, see, they are waiting; you are the hero of the hour, I must not keep you from your congratulations on your just triumph."

The party did not break up until eight o'clock the next morning. Speeches were made, Mr Fox professing his gratitude to the Prince, stating "It is a circumstance of pride and honour particularly dear to me that, pursuing the interests of the people, I have at the same time gained his approbation."

George, with boyish devotion, answered, "I will not now speak of my private regard for Mr Fox; I have entered into his interests from a conviction not only that his talents are the brightest in the empire, but that his principles are the best, and his motives the purest; and I assure him that the prejudices of them that do not know him shall never alter my personal and political attachment."

Not satisfied with this, the Prince gave one of the grandest garden parties ever known. A magnificent *fête*, at which everyone present was dressed in blue and buff, and the gentlemen, including himself, waited on the ladies at table. The grounds of Carlton House were separated only by a low wall from the road that led from St James's Palace to the Houses of Parliament, and the sight to the King of these proceedings when going in procession to open the session can hardly have been delightful.

But what of the lady of the river bank of two years before? It was Wednesday, the 21st of the July following,

that the Prince saw her again. He was starting the next day on his second visit to Brighton, for he had gone there on a visit to the Duke of Cumberland the autumn before. With the carelessness of youth, which fears no more than a headache in the morning, he was going to make a night of it.

Driving to the King's theatre in the Haymarket in search of a friend, accompanied by several others, he was induced to enter one of the side boxes, though he kept in the rear and the majority of the people did not know he was there. In a box immediately opposite were two ladies and a gentleman, and *she* was one of the party. He recognised her instantly and turned a hot, flushed face to Lord Barrymore who was beside him. "I know that lady—opposite the one in blue," he said thickly. "I must go and speak to her."

"Not now, Sir."

"Ay, at once."

"Wait until the end of the act, Sir."

"I wonder who she is with?"

Someone went to inquire, and came back with the information that it was Lady Sefton's box, adding, "The one in black velvet is Lady Sefton."

"I will go over now."

"Sir, I entreat you, wait a little."

"Do you mean I'm—not fit—" in quite a new tone.

"You are tired, Sir," said Barrymore, carefully.

"I—see. I sha'n't leave town to-morrow, then. No, I'll go over now."

The door opened, the Duke of Cumberland came in. "Hallo, Taffy!" he exclaimed. "What is it?"

"There is a lady opposite I know and wish to speak to," returned the Prince in slow, loud, clear tones, to convince himself and those around him of his perfect sobriety, and they say, "Don't speak to her."

"I should think not now, egad!" returned the Duke, significantly. "Have her followed home, you can then pursue her at your leisure." The Prince had leant back and closed his eyes, he roused himself with an effort.

"What?"

The Duke repeated his former advice. "Come along now and finish the night somewhere."

"I—don't want—to—go."

"Nonsense! Gad's life! pull yourself together and be a man."

"I don't want to go to Bri—"

"No, then you sha'n't," said the Duke, who had no objection whatever to see his nephew the hero of a more serious intrigue than any that had engrossed his attention up till now. "A messenger shall be sent. Come along now, my *vis-à-vis* is at the door."

He took him by the arm and led him off and outside. They had scarcely started, when the lad collapsed into a deep sleep against the soft cushions of the carriage, and was with difficulty awakened when they arrived at their destination, Lord Chesterfield's, Blackheath.

"He is young," said the Duke, in apology, as when they had been welcomed and had taken their place at a faro table, a few minutes after his nephew's head sank on to his arms. "His head is weak as yet, best let him be and get someone else to take his hand."

Four hours later the young man woke with a parched throat, a splitting head, and a horrible feeling of sickness. A melancholy grey daylight was fighting a winning game for supremacy with the candles that were still alight, though many had guttered out; the floor was strewn with used packs of cards, and two or three broken glasses; and an overturned bottle on one table still dripped red drops into a crimson pool beneath on the polished floor. The snores of some overtaken roysterer filled the room with unmusical sound.

Alas for the boasts of the Duke! His face wore a foolish smile, and he was standing up to give a toast to the others, heavy-eyed and haggard. "Let us drink—what, Taff, you awake? Never mind, join us." Someone gave the young man a glass full, he did not wait to notice what of, but put it gratefully to his lips.

"I drink," interrupted Major Hanger (who was also present, he was a great friend of the wild Duke's), with a quick, shrewd glance at the Prince, "short reign to the King!"

George took his glass from his lips and dashed it full in Hanger's face. For an instant the man hesitated—to

quarrel with his patron—and yet— The others, half sobered, half foolish, were without exception looking to him. Then, with a wild laugh, he turned to the man next him, "The toast goes round!" he cried, and repeated the action, and one and all followed suit and deluged each other in turn with the contents of his glass in mad and senseless merriment.

But the Prince staggered away from them and from the hot room, found his way to the big cool hall, a servant called him a chair and helped him in. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he woke to find himself in his own chamber at Carlton House.

Lord Barrymore's servant was waiting his pleasure, he was told, and instantly he summoned him.

"The lady is a widow," the man said. "She lives at 6 Tilney Street, Park Lane; her name is Mrs Fitzherbert—she is supposed to be fairly rich and a Roman Catholic."

"Anything else?"

"She has a house on Richmond Hill, your Royal Highness."

"But she is living in London now?"

"No, please, your Royal Highness, she started by the stage this morning for Brighthelmstone at nine o'clock."

CHAPTER IV

CONTAINING THE ACCOUNT OF A VERY DULL HOUSEHOLD

"Youth goes toward youth."

MEANWHILE, the lady whose presence that eventful Wednesday night had created such great excitement, and in one breast at least had awakened such profound emotion, had at the conclusion of the performance bidden farewell to her friends and gone quietly home in her chair. She never dreamed that Lord Barrymore's footman was following behind. The next morning she was well on the road to Brighton before the first sleepy ejaculations from the remaining roysterers at Blackheath had escaped their dry lips.

Brighton was then but just coming into fashion. It was a long and tedious journey from London, involving a whole day's ceaseless travelling. The horses were old, too, and insufficient. In after years when the town became a recognised Royal resort, it became possible to comfortably travel there from Westminster in six hours.

The party travelled by coach—it consisted of, besides Mrs Fitzherbert, the lady whose guest she was going to be, Mrs Douglas, with her daughter Cecilia, and her son Bernard. Mrs Douglas was an old woman, and her fear of gentlemen of the road was a positive monomania. She would not trust herself with post-boys who might be in league with robbers, not even when protected by her stout son. She had her house and establishment of servants, her horses, carriages and gardens at Highbury, and loathed moving from thence, but the call of health is ever imperative, and Cecilia, who was a twittering virgin of forty, had been recommended the new sea water cure for strengthening her

flabby body and putting fresh light into her dull, colourless eyes. I write *new*, for although Dr Russell's remedy had then been before the public over forty years, it had not received the impetus that made it so universal till the September before, and slow, old-fashioned people took a long time to grasp an idea, even as they do now. It was with fear and misgiving that Mrs Douglas was going to trust her daughter to the mercy of the treacherous sea. She was to meet friends in the town and a house at Patcham had been lent her, whither her household had preceded her, thus giving her privacy and saving her the discomfort of a fisherman's cottage metamorphosed into a bijou marine residence.

It was late when they reached their destination, and it was two or three days before Mrs Douglas seemed at all to realise that the dreaded journey was over and they were safely arrived. Then she began to unpack her treasures and settle herself to feel home-like and content. Cecilia commenced on Friday morning her dutiful course of treatment, and came back radiant and glowing, already with some colour in her cheeks, and filled brimful with the charms and delights of the town, and tattle of the Prince of Wales, who, to the joy of the scandal-mongers and gossip-makers, had arrived in the middle of the night. Their beautiful guest, however, stirred not abroad—she had come partly to please Mrs Douglas, an old friend of her mother's, and also for companionship. She had no intention of undergoing the "cure." So, whilst Cecilia looked up their friends and fluttered about in unaccustomed enjoyment, safely escorted by a dutiful brother, who privately would much rather have stayed at home, Mrs Fitzherbert, in a large, serviceable, borrowed apron, quietly remained with Mrs Douglas. By the following Monday, however, this lady began to insist that her guest was not her servant, and that she, too, must enjoy herself and see the sights. They were at the dinner table.

"Nay," protested Mrs Fitzherbert, smiling, "you forget I was here two years ago and I know them all well."

"Oh, Maria, they tell me you would scarce know the place, with new houses springing up every day," protested

Miss Douglas, with the despairing gush of well-developed spinsterhood; "and all the fine ladies and their Paris gowns, and the great gentlemen, and the wicked Prince— "

"We saw him to-day," interrupted Bernard in deep, slower tones. "He is well enough to look at, the shameless profligate."

"Oh, Brother, he is a fine man. There was not a gallant there with so bright an eye or so shapely a leg. I should have known him by his imperiousness at once, if Amelia Taunton— "

"I wish to hear nothing of any of the Brunswickers, Cecilia, good or bad," interrupted Mrs Douglas. "To me, bad they must all be." She rose stiffly—they were without any servants in the room—and raised her glass. "God preserve our rightful King," she said, and her voice trembled, "and grant he and his may come to their own at last."

The others drank the toast silently, and Cecilia, abashed, did not take up the thread of her adventures again until Mrs Douglas smiled more indulgently. "Still, child," she said in a lighter tone, addressing Mrs Fitzherbert, "there is no reason why you should all the while be cooped up here with an old woman like me, and Celia gadding about. You shall go to-night and see the sights, Bernard shall drive you. What gaieties are there going, my son?"

"There is a ball to-morrow night," cried Cecilia, "a public ball, but only for the *élite*, and Mrs Taunton was so pressing that we should join with her party. 'Tis at the Castle Tavern."

"A public ball at a tavern," said Mrs Douglas, doubtfully.

"The Duke of Marlborough and Duc de Chartres will be there," interrupted Cecilia, "and all the nobility." Fortunately, Mrs Douglas did not know who was the bosom friend of M. le Duc.

"I think it is quite respectable," said Bernard.

"They are the usual thing here," affirmed Mrs Fitzherbert. "The ballroom only takes its name from the inn, and all the entertainments are held there. I went to several the year before last."

"Oh, well, if you can vouch for its respectability, Maria. I want you all to enjoy yourselves, my dears."

"Dear, dear mamma, thank you, oh, so much!" cooed Miss Celia, prettily. "May I write then to Mrs Taunton and accept for us all?"

"Not for me," said Mrs Fitzherbert. "I am too staid a matron and shall stay with your mother."

The gaunt Cecilia was secretly pleased, Bernard disgusted, and Mrs Douglas firmly opposed. "No, my love," she said, at the end of some argument, "you did not come here to be my nurse, and I will not have your good nature so imposed on. If you do not consent, Cecilia cannot go. You must chaperon her for me. I will not trust her with flighty Lydia Taunton."

At the fashionable hour that evening when all the world and his wife took the air on the now historic Steyne, Bernard Douglas's brand new phaeton swung at an exhilarating pace towards that goal through the dusty lanes where summer flowers were withering from the hot embraces of the sun.

"We will drive to Thomas's Library," he said, "and then take a turn on foot with the rest, before delivering Celia's note to Mrs Taunton, an't please you?"

"Delighted," acquiesced Mrs Fitzherbert, readily. "You will find me a most easy woman to satisfy."

Beau and belle flirted, ogled and talked to the manner born or the manner acquired, according to their being visitors or the townfolk apeing their betters, and promenaded with grace, one and all alike in their impatience for the rising of their sun, or, in other words, the arrival of the Prince of Wales. They talked of nothing else, his extravagance, his generosity, his wild recklessness. Many shook their heads, and these were the older, wiser ones; others spoke more lightly of "wild oats" and a young man's folly. Their voices would drop to whispers as, with meaning smiles, the already stale scandal of "Perdita" Robinson was again discussed. But heap abuse as they might, there was not a man that was not dressed in the nearest possible imitation of him, or a woman who did not sigh for his approving glance.

Bernard pointed out the celebrated statesman, Mr Fox, the Duke of Marlborough, and many more who, during the few days he had been at Brighton, he had recognised.

They met Mrs Taunton, a woman of about thirty, and her step-daughter Amelia, who was very near her age, a languishing person devoted to over-following the fashions. They both gushed delighted approval, that was obviously insincere, at the Douglas party joining them, for both ladies dreaded nothing so much as a rival.

After they had left them and solemnly made the circuit twice, Mrs Fitzherbert suggested they should retire. Before Bernard could answer, a lane cleared as though by magic, and he caught her by the arm and pulled her on one side. "It is the Elector's son," he whispered, taking the opportunity to place his lips in the nearest possible conjunction to her well-shaped ear. She slipped from him and turned her head quickly towards the advancing party.

Ever afterwards the memory of that moment stayed. The stormy sunset, the rainbow sea, the crowd of glittering, laughing men and women, and the principal figure—brave, reckless, manly, defiant. . . .

A flash of keen recognition passed over her face as it broke into a bright smile, for the young man who was the leader of the little body was the youth of the Thames bank two years before. He was laughing carelessly, and then he suddenly saw them. He flushed from brow to chin and his eyes flashed with intense excitement. However, he bowed low to her with particular *empressement* and with a courtly grace that became afterwards justly celebrated, doffing his hat with marked reverence. Her responding curtsey was low and stately and matched in dignity the bow. Then he passed on, whilst people whispered queries as to who she was.

She turned her astonished eyes to Bernard. "Who is he?" she cried. "You remember my telling you of Susie Fielding and myself on the river banks meeting a young German? That young man is the same. Do you know who he is?"

Bernard turned a sober glance on her. "That is—so called—his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, Madam," he said gravely.

"Never!"

"'Tis God's truth."

She gave a delighted laugh, a child's laugh almost, filled

with frank, delighted vanity. "The Prince of Wales!" she cried.

They were in the crowd again, and an old crone begging overheard her words. "God bless him," she said in cracked tones. "God bless his generous heart and his kindness to an old woman!" She rattled some coins suggestively in her hand.

"Yes, my good mother, a true Englishwoman's prayer," said Mrs Fitzherbert, with a fervour quite foreign, dropping Bernard's arm to give her money, "God bless him, I say with you from my heart."

They did not arrive the next night until nine o'clock, and the ball was in full swing, Bernard having wrung one dance from the fair widow, angrily applied himself to other dames, for men danced in those days. Not but that, had she so wished, she might have had partners and to spare. Indeed, the M.C. had all the evening an inspiring stream of young bloods at his heels praying an introduction to the "angelic blonde."

But she sent them in nearly every case disappointed away, and stayed with sober matrons, keeping a maternal eye on Cecilia, who was fifteen years her senior.

Suddenly the band played the National Athem and, followed by the inspiriting strains of "Rule Britannia," the Prince and his party, unexpected, amidst great excitement, entered the room. He led out the Duchess of Marlborough, and others in the room could scarce attend to their own steps so filled were they with admiration at his graceful movements.

"Do you see the Prince looking our way?" asked old Taunton of Mrs Fitzherbert at the conclusion. "By Gad, he is coming here too!"

The next dance was a Minuet de la Cour, and the Prince, whose eyes during his first dance had roved continually about, now steadily approached them. Miss Taunton languished more than ever, Celia giggled and Mrs Taunton tried not to look self-conscious. As for Mrs Fitzherbert, a flash of intuition told her what was coming, and she was coolly prepared.

A Very Dull Household

Nothing could have excelled the *sang-froid* of her curtsey or the easy grace with which she went through the following dance under the eyes of all there marvelling at his condescension in approaching her himself instead of sending an equerry; but all suddenly remembered the night before.

When it was over the Prince procured a cloak like magic, and led her into the cool dark night without.

He bent his handsome head and kissed her hands. "You had not forgotten, Margaritta?" he cried triumphantly.

"No," she said, "I had not forgotten. It was a pleasant incident."

"The happiest days of my life," he declared. "Till the wild rapture of last night's—"

"Reminder of my existence," she suggested.

"The fulfilment of all my longing," he contradicted.

"You flatter me, Sir."

"Lovers speak the truth," he said.

She stiffened. "If your Royal Highness pleases, we will return to the dancing-room," she submitted.

He bent his head. "I am your servant, Madam, in all things," he avowed.

But she danced again with him that night.

CHAPTER V

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF A LADY AND GENTLEMAN

"Can we not play together a brief while?"

PERHAPS a better title than the above would be "playing with fire." However, let it serve.

'Twas the day after the ball.

A summer wind bore homely rural sounds through Mrs Fitzherbert's open country window as she sat up, in a white, lavender-scented, dimity-hung bed and leisurely sipped the frothing chocolate that then took the place of our now beloved morning tea.

She mused on the ball. "I was very hard on him," she finally decided, and she thought continually of it all the time she dressed, and some time later it still occupied her mind as she indited a voluminous document to a friend, in which, be it noted, mention of the ball of the previous night was conspicuous by its absence.

She finished it and sat biting the end of her quill, then with a laugh at the exquisite folly of it, she penned the following:—

> "'Princes, like women, find few real friends.
> All who approach them their own ends pursue,
> Lovers and Ministers are seldom true.'

"So spake a bard well used to courts and my sex—to you, my Prince. I ought, agreeable to the style of those who surround you, to pay an implicit obedience, and meet you, as you desired, on quitting the ball last night. Meet you! What, you?—the Prince of Wales, whose character in the annals of gallantry is too well known for me to suppose that,

after such a meeting, I should have any character at all. I am unused to address people of excessive rank—my manners are unaffected. I know not a sentiment I would wish to disguise—"

"Molly! Molly! are you in your room? May I come in?"

She threw the letter into her desk and dropped the lid.

"Yes," she cried indifferently.

Enter Miss Celia. "What are you doing?" she asked. "Musing on last night's conquest?"

We object naturally when sharp friends put their fingers exactly on the right spot and one we are touchy about, so Mrs Fitzherbert withered Cecilia with a look, and said, "This letter to Mrs Errington has been my employment." She gathered the now dry sheets together and began to fold them.

"They are all dry," persisted the damsel, not to be snubbed, "and one can write better even than *think*." Then she went on, "And wasn't it lovely! Oh, how proud you must feel! There is not a woman in the whole of Brighton that is not talking of you and envying you to-day. You are just as great as—"

"Flora Macdonald," contemptuously.

"Well, and why not?" defiantly. "Oh, it is deliciously romantic."

"My dear Celia, you mistake me utterly. I have no ambition to be the 'talk of the town.' I was more annoyed than words can say last night at that young man's well-meant but most embarrassing attentions. And as for Flora Macdonald, well, *she* saved the Prince's life, there is no comparison—"

"You suggested it, anyhow."

"Well, well. I once some years ago did him—"

"The German?"

"The Prince," she said, biting her lip; "a slight service, and—"

"Flora Macdonald to the life. But how—"

To Mrs Fitzherbert's intense delight, Mrs Douglas's voice was heard calling. Surely never was a voice more welcome. It appeared that the artificial Miss Hoyden Cecilia had

been sent to ask her to drive with her mother, only with an affected girlish indifference had forgotten all about it.

When, an hour later, she settled herself beside Mrs Douglas in the open barouche, Mrs Fitzherbert suggested a drive inland, it was at once negatived, and she acquiesced quietly and silently.

"What, drive inland, my dear! You forget I am more than curious to see the town. What is the good of staying near the sea if one does not avail one's self to benefit by it?"

Of course, the worst happened. That was a foregone conclusion. With crimsoned face and bitter annoyance at her heart, Mrs Fitzherbert majestically acknowledged the humble salutations of the half-dozen horsemen who reined aside as they drove past.

Mrs Douglas gave a vigorous pull to the string of her calash that nearly went to break it, as, old woman though she was, she was polluted by the inquisitive gaze of a certain pair of Royal eyes, presently she slackened it, and her head emerging from its enshroudment, she turned it on her companion.

"Maria, my dear," she said, "it is no matter, you may think, of mine, but your position is a most difficult, a most dangerous one; for your own sake you cannot be too careful, for Heaven knows how it will all end. You seem beset by trouble on all sides."

"It will be all right," Mrs Fitzherbert reassured her, with a conviction she was far from feeling. "If I am discreet, no harm can come out of this boyish folly. I shall avoid him, of course, all I can. I shall not go to the next ball, as he will be there."

"But I must stop it," she declared, when she got home and safe alone in her room. She took out her letter and read it through, and then seizing a pen continued, "and I should be happy only to know that behaviour from your Royal Highness that must command silent respect from Your father's affectionate subject, MARGARITTA."

"It would never do for him to know my real name," she thought, as she summoned her maid, a Frenchwoman,

and sharp as a needle. "Céleste," she said diffidently, "is it possible to convey this letter to—the person it is addressed to?" She hung her head like a discovered child.

Not a muscle in the woman's face moved.

"*Parfaitement*, Madame," she said. "*Il y arrivera point de difficulté. Sera-t-il une réponse?*"

"No, no! No answer. And don't say where you come from."

"*Très bien*, Madame."

"And, Céleste, you can have my grey silk sack, the one you admire so."

"*Madame est bien généreuse.*"

But there *was* an answer. It came unceremoniously in the wrapping round a large bouquet that was tossed, none could say by whom, right into the lady's lap as she was driving inoffensively towards Rottingdean. She found it, when she went to put the blossoms in a bowl of water.

"I find but too often cause to lament that rank in life—that, perhaps, is envied me by all the world. Princes, indeed, have few real friends—even your sex fly me, and does the amiable Margaritta allow her better judgment to be biassed by public calumny? It is beneath the heart that reigns in so lovely a bosom! I do not command, far from it, I only entreat a further knowledge of you, and where is the impropriety of permitting me a meeting? A condescension that will make me most happy. Not your * * * the son of your * * * but your admiring, your adoring

"* * * * * *"

To this she replied,—

"*Monday.*

"Public calumny I am above—my own reasons and observation are the claims that forbid a private meeting. Already the notice bestowed upon me at the ball by your Royal Highness brought on me the envy of my own sex and the impertinence of yours. I like not your associates, par-

ticularly that wild man Hanger, he stares me out of countenance. The difference of our rank forbids a further knowledge of me; I entreat you to avoid me. I shall be to-night at the ball, not because I like it, but my not having appeared at the last I find observed, and some of our visitors yesterday told me I was too much engaged by the Prince's notice to bestow any on those beneath him! Come to the ball, dance with Lady Charlotte Bertie and take not the slightest notice of me. Why should you wish to take more? there are a hundred much prettier women! Mrs Oliver, for example, you think her pretty, she is indeed divine! And she has a husband, an officer of spirit, to shield her from the rude attacks of envy. You may enjoy her conversation, she is yours, and malice dare not speak, but me, an unprotected, helpless orphan? It will be cruel to pursue the humble MARGARITTA."

"Cold, unkind Margaritta! Why am I forbid that attention which is your due—which all the world must pay you? Why am I doomed to pass an insipid evening with a woman of fashion *only*, when my heart and my better judgment would lead me to the most elegant, the most accomplished fair that Brighton has to boast? Mrs Oliver is beauteous, but it is not mere beauty I admire, it is expression—'a something than beauty dearer.' You know my opinion of Lady Charlotte Bertie; her rank entitles her to my hand, nothing beside could induce me. I respect her grace (?) for the sake of the best of mothers and of Surrey's, and, therefore, I comply with what politeness and etiquette require; but why must I give up the enjoyment of your conversation? Be superior to common talk. I am concerned Hanger displeases you; I am certain he never designed it. This wild man has really some good points; that he admires you I wonder not, and, perhaps, he is not perfectly delicate in his admiration. Does Sheridan likewise displease you, and little Tommy Onslow, that you say you do not like my associates? If they do, they shall not trouble you; I want no company when in yours!

"I felt your absence from the ball and rejoice that you will grace it this evening. It is impossible to see you with in-

difference! In vain would you exact so hard a task from the tenderest of your friends.—The obliged "* * * * * *"

"What a disappointment. Ah, cruel Margaritta! I entered the ballroom last night in the highest spirits. My eyes flew round with impatience in search of the only bright object they wished to see—but they sought in vain! I asked Hanger and Sheridan after you; they had seen you airing—not dressed for the ball. I was disconcerted! Is it possible so gentle a form, a countenance so soft, so tender, can be thus unkind? I danced with Lady C. B * * *; Hanger with a Mrs B * * *, pretty and animated, and I was persuaded at about one o'clock to join them in a Scottish reel with the little Countess, who is far from handsome, but dances well. The small company that remained were diverted, but nothing could reanimate my spirits.

"Why do you thus fly me? Once more I entreat a meeting; let it be at your own house if you please, where is the impropriety? If you grace not the C * * * (which hundreds may rejoice at), why refuse attentions that are most due to you?

"I wish not to be considered here in my public character—much less by you—than as any other private gentleman whose eyes and whose heart assure him you are most worthy his regard.

"I esteem a character that I would not injure; report says yours is as faultless as your form—allow me, permit me a further knowledge of you. You will not find me, I trust, undeserving of your good opinion, but that I shall always remain.—Your devoted and admiring "* * * * * *"

To these letters this was the reply,—

"Surprised that I was not at the ball! recollect your letter in the morning—*it is impossible to see you with indifference;* what, then, was I to expect? No one thing that I wished. You imagine, I doubt not, that my vanity would have been so well gratified that reason would have been silent. Had I suffered the woman only to prevail, this must have been the case; but a thousand confirming circumstances

have almost quelled the foibles of my sex and vanity you must suppose dead in me—when I withdraw thus from your notice. And yet I wish your friendship; I am deeply interested in your fame, and desire most ardently that you may be as eminent in goodness as in rank. I cannot receive your visits, the family I am with would leave the place immediately on such an event. They are what the world calls extreme good people. What I should call outrageous. They are not of the number of your friends. Your first unfortunate vote in the House against our gracious Sovereign they will never forgive, and it is in vain that I urge the impetuosity of youth, that love of independence so natural to us all—that from reason you gave not that vote:—I dare believe you never thought about it. Fox desired it, and you were glad to *appear* to have a will of your own. But why enter I into politics, yet you make me a politician. I was violent for Pitt—I now dislike him, but like not Fox notwithstanding. A man of bad private character, though of the greatest talents and blessed with uncommon genius, he can never deserve the love of a worthy heart.

"I air'd last night to Lewes and paid a very stupid visit, yet was I not dissatisfied. It was a proper sacrifice to prudence. I am now going a-sailing. Our party is large, the day fine, and the gale favourable.

"If you write again, be cautious how your letter is given me. I think it needless to desire you to destroy mine, they have no merit to entitle them to preservation; and as they are not directed, or signed with my full name, I think they can never be made public. Yet I am not without fear. Such trash would be a treasure to the printer, and the very initials of your name would make a book sell wonderfully. Adieu."

CHAPTER VI

GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME

"To advise and guide suits with my years."

I MUST now initiate the reader into the disturbed and miserable state of Bernard Douglas's Heart.

Never was that organ in a man more distressed. He was a Refused Lover, which is tantamount to saying his friendship was kept on sufferance. He had to be extremely careful, or find himself dismissed altogether.

High were his hopes when the ill-fated visit was consented to, joyful his mien, light his tread, and now, indeed, his dejection knew no bounds, a cruelly short time was his to live in a fool's paradise.

But to see the beloved object playing with fire and laughing at the edge of a precipice, to be able to do nothing nor dare a word, that was worst of all. What was the good of being of old Catholic family of ancient and honourable descent, devoted to the rightful dynasty, and ready to fight at any moment to the last in that sacred cause if called upon, when a heretical upstart young princeling of wild and dangerous repute, who in his eyes was an intruder in the land, came riding along, and, with a look and a laugh, and a dare-devil masterfulness had indifferently offered the handkerchief, sweeping all before him by storm as a matter of course, whilst he, Bernard, who considered himself, infinitely his superior, took a back seat as though of no consequence? For Bernard thought the case far more desperate than it was. Rising early one morning, he had come upon the Frenchwoman in earnest conversation with a man in an unmistakable livery, and his impotence to interfere maddened him.

He knew her pride. He might speak to his mother, and the only result would be she would quit the poor protection of his house and take lodging in the town, a prey to every scandalous insinuation. Already she was the observed by all observers, people he had the slightest acquaintance with eagerly renewed and fostered such, everyone with the faintest excuse came flocking to call. The scurrilous pen of the caricaturist was already at work, and he himself had entered a print shop to come out with considerably lighter pockets and a roll of the trash that he indignantly burnt.

Black clouds seemed to him piling up on every side; he could see not a single ray of cheering light. He dreaded every visitor, for fear some chance word should open his mother's eyes, he dreaded the sharp glances of Cecilia, and, most of all, he dreaded the wild dash, the unscrupulous disregard of all minor things, when a coveted object was desired, that so characterised the Prince, and the haughty consciousness of her own unsullied honour and purity of intentions that might lead the lady concerned into the most dangerous positions, that would cause the cruellest constructions to be put on them, satisfied though she might be that she knew herself right.

Guilt brings craftiness and deceit. She would challenge the world to believe her virtue, and the world would not particularly respectfully decline.

There was one idea that was almost too terrible to him to think of, that turned him sick with dread, for then, indeed, there could be no escape for her. What if she were learning to love this handsome, swaggering lad?

He knew not one single thing in favour of the Prince. He was a heretic, that was enough to damn him utterly in his narrow and somewhat bigoted mind; he was a spendthrift, and the moment he had become his own master he had chiefly distinguished himself by coming to violent loggerheads with his father and consorting with that father's enemies, amongst whom were the fastest card-playing roysterers of the day.

She could never marry him. Could he live to see that proud head low with shame at an equivocal position? And

even should she deem the world well lost, dark rumours were afloat concerning the unfortunate prisoner of Ahlden, though all the facts had not come to light. Was the descendant of her jailer a person to whom, without a struggle, he could trust the happiness of the woman he loved? Feeling a traitor, he wrote a letter. He was guarded, what he said in it only hinted at the danger—but he most earnestly requested the immediate presence of the addressee, Harry Errington, Esquire.

Meanwhile, Céleste was earning quite a little fortune both in coin and kisses, for Roberts was in no way bashful to cull a little amusement himself, whilst he transacted his master's business, and two separate highly dangerous little packets were growing rapidly in dimensions.

"Do you indeed wish for my friendship? Ah! Margaritta, I know not how to believe you; while thus cold, thus insensible to all my desires. A meeting again refused: who are these very good people whom I have so much reason to dislike, they have no paternal authority, I understand; why, then, regard their narrow prejudices? May I entreat your history; yet I almost dread to hear an account of a life in which I am already so much interested and which makes me still more enamoured of the dear, perverse historian. Politics should never have been mentioned to a lady, but as you seem to blame my conduct, I wish to exculpate myself in your opinion, but you must allow me to do it personally, for the subject is too long for a letter. On horseback you might permit me the pleasure of attending you—I have seen you riding with only a servant, let me join you without any. I never ride but with one here, and he shall be forbid, because my livery would carry a mark that you would not like. Your servant would not know me, and report would have nothing to say about it. I entreat you to allow me this and appoint an early day. Your letters I keep as an invaluable treasure, and shall hardly be so careless of them as you expect.

"So young, so lovely, and yet so coldly prudent. Ah, Margaritta, would that you partook of the warmth that burns in the heart of your faithful * * * * *"

"I have not been well! That fickle element on which with so much pleasure I embarked greatly disordered me; quiet and gentle exercise had been prescribed, and I am at present forbid riding on horseback.

"I entreat you, attempt not to visit me; you will not be admitted and *you ought* not to subject yourself to a refusal. Surely there is a haughty inflexibility about me that should make you cease to wish for more acquaintance; why do you pursue me with such unwearied attentions? I saw you on the beach when I was brought on shore; I could not avoid returning your graceful compliments. The sailors who carried me told me it was your Royal Highness. Everyone knows you; my groom, I doubt not, amongst the rest. I heard Sheridan pronounce my name with an encomium I did not approve, I perceived that he would have led you towards me; I thank you, my friend, for retiring. I am above affectation, and you may believe me grateful when I say *I thank you.* To show my gratitude I will comply with your request and speak of my past life.

"Parental authority I never knew, parental love and tenderness once blessed me. But now no father or mother can I boast, my adverse fate has snatched both dear relations from me. My father, who had the honour of a captain's commission in the army, was a man of letters, and gave up all the hours he could take from his profession to educate his sons. My elder brother gained with applause his twentieth year; he had a friend who rivalled him in every grace, and Frederick's virtues shone brighter in the noble Edward. I loved them both, but something always told me I loved Edward best. I thought my brother wronged by the preference, but it was allowed by all our circle to be just,—and hope and fancy painted such a set of bright illusions that happiness seemed all my own. Suddenly the prospect darkened, my parents in one fatal hour were torn from my embrace by Death's unrelenting hand! Thus dashed from joy, I thought myself most wretched—but Fate soon showed me that my woes were not completed. Frederick and Edward, they are not! They fell at Bunker's Hill—but the hour of anguish insup-

portable is past, let me not recall it; o'er my pensive head calm resignation waves her healing wand, I have learnt to bear patiently.

"The family I am with I have obligations to, but not of a pecuniary kind, and I am wooing health for the sake of society, which has some claims on everyone. Adieu!"

"Your tale of woe has greatly affected me! how pathetic, how elegant are all your expressions! I apprehended but too justly the effect your history would have over me; for I love, I esteem you, more than ever! Start not at the sound, but let me indeed be your friend—thank you for so kind an appreciation; I will deserve it. I rejoice that you were pleased with my self-denial. Sheridan did, indeed, want me to welcome you on shore; and I felt that I wished it more than him, but I did not know all the party, and was afraid of displeasing you. I hope you are not, indeed, indisposed, though it hurts my vanity to suppose you so unwilling as to grant me a meeting; I should be still more pained at your illness, and might rashly venture to enter a household where my presence would be unwelcome.

"To satisfy your punctilio, I never venture to join you on the Steyne, and take no other notice of you than what politeness will authorise. To a mind so generous as Margaritta's, this wish to oblige cannot pass unnoticed, and I flatter myself the day will come when she will condescend to reward by her presence the respectful distance, the unwearied attention of her * * * * * *"

"Your vanity may rest secure. I am really too ill to venture on horseback. If you attempt to visit me, you will neither see nor hear more of MARGARITTA."

"I was drawn to the Steyne this evening by a party who drank tea with us, and would not excuse me (though I was really far too ill to go out), because it was generally believed that your Royal Highness, in imitation of a ridiculous Frenchman, was going to run a race backwards. Oh, that you had a Mentor to guard you from those numerous perils

that around you wait! The greatest of which are your present companions. As I beheld you the other day like another Harry:—

"'Rise from the ground like a feathered Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease into your seat,
As if an angel dropped down from the clouds,
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
And 'witch the world with noble horsemanship.'

"I could not avoid continuing the comparison and wish you would sometimes use that Prince's words:—

"'Reply not to me with a fool-born jest,
For Heaven doth know, so shall the world perceive,
That I have turned away my former self,
So will I those that kept me company.'

"Adieu. If I am free, remember it is your own condescension that draws on you these remarks from

"MARGARITTA."

"If you wish me a Mentor, let me entreat you to assume the character yourself; no one can be so capable or so agreeable to me; and you know not the good effect this may have; but I must at the same time desire that you will not give credit to all the idle reports you may hear to my disadvantage, as was the ridiculous one you mention. If my situation in life makes me many friends, it likewise makes me many enemies, and you will allow for this. Your reproofs, far from offending (which is what Margaritta could not do), convince me of a kind interest you take in my welfare that flatters me extremely.

"I answer you from the same author. Warwick speaks thus to Henry IV.:—

"'My gracious lord, you look beyond him quite,
The prince but studies his companions,
Like a strange tongue, wherein to gain the language,
'Tis needful that the most immodest word
Be looked upon and learned; which once attain'd,
Your highness knows, comes to no further use
But to be known and hated. So, like gross terms,
The prince will, in the perfectness of time,

Give a Dog a Bad Name

Cast off his followers : and their memory
Shall as a pattern, or a measure live,
By which his grace must mete the lives of others,
Turning past evils to advantages.'

"You admire Shakespeare, I perceive! He is, indeed, an author that all people of taste must love to enthusiasm. I have read this play with attention, and a time may come when I shall likewise surprise my subjects if my better genius, which shines forth in the sweet form of Margaritta, will deign to add her influence which, like the sun, may draw some latent blossom from an expiring plant that otherwise would sink into obscurity.

"My companions, you must allow, are mostly men of rank and family. Poor Hanger I pity, and he has his merits. Lord Coleraine has been an unkind brother to him, Hanger too generous in return. He has a fund of humour that is always entertaining, and a fine voice. Sheridan is young and giddy like myself. Tom Onslow amuses me. I can say nothing in his praise; he has, indeed, nothing to boast but his coachmanship. Such characters are necessary in society.

"But I have engaged you too long. Correct me with friendship and I will prove worthy your esteem. — The obliged, * * * * *"

CHAPTER VII

A YOUNG BLOOD

"Now all the world is at her failing hour, and at her fairest."

"'Tis seldom when the bee doth leave her comb
In the dead carrion."

"IT is the answer of the King to your quotation, and I can make no better. Shakespeare is, indeed, a very great favourite of mine; he paints all his characters so much to the life, that every line of his is interesting to me. I confess that the three plays of the Henrys are more particularly so. You say you have read the first part of Henry IV. with attention. See you not a strange similarity to Hal—sweet Hal. The present values himself that his companions are mostly men of rank and family. When I have urged this by way of excuse, I have been told 'so much the worse—they will not be soon shaken off, they must be provided for, are they not all needy men?' I desire no answer to all this. I am unfit for a Mentor. You compliment too highly in your wish that I should become one. Seek me not, I entreat you. Forget! Or remember that I *am only* the haughty MARGARITTA."

"You reject all my wishes with a haughty disdain that greatly mortifies me. I am open to correction, I avow my errors. I wish you to assume a character which you are most fit to shine in, and which may be of infinite service to me, but I wish and entreat in vain—unkind Margaritta! Even the words of an author I passionately admire are quoted against me. Thus you turn me from a book I might profit from; for, when I attempt to read it, it reminds me of the cold, the severe, fair one whose friendship I have most wished to cultivate, who attributes to me all the faults of my

predecessor Hal, and believes me incapable to finish the character.

"Am I to answer all the idle, unjust things you hear to my disadvantage? Pardon my heat, I am disappointed! Hurt, I acknowledge; but my heart feels, how much more, at the sickly pale of the finest cheek that I beheld this morning. Had I not some merit when I met you on horseback, not to join you? I debated it for half a moment, but the reserved air with which you returned my compliments determined me. I was repaid in the look you afterwards gave me, for I thought in that look you approved my discretion. Sickness only, I hope, has chilled that heart formed for more generous sensations. Your restoration to health I earnestly wish and your return to tender feelings. Judge for yourself if I am not your attentive

"TELEMACHUS."

"I was beloved by Edward, I was the sister of Frederick, and can you wonder I have pride? I loved Edward, and are you surprised at my coldness? Perhaps it is not possible for any but a pre-engaged heart to behold you without feeling sentiments of tenderness. My heart is dead to love, but it flows with every other passion, with the greatest ardour, my friendship is warm and constant, nothing but your own imprudence can ever deprive you of it. I feel myself obliged by your attention to my wishes in not joining me when on horseback. I find great benefit from that exercise, and shall pursue it. If my grateful look repaid you, I am happy. You think me severe, I know, but you know not the just reasons I have to appear so. You are impatient of restraint and are above appearances; but, believe me, your rank requires rather more than common attention, for every eye is on you. Adieu, my dear Telemachus,

"MARGARITTA."

"Every eye is, alas! too severely on me — cold Margaritta. Yes; you have loved, but why mortify me on this subject? I have (though the world believes it not) some delicacy in my love—when it aspires to so

bright an object, and I could have wished you had never felt this passion so baneful to repose. How happy to have first awoke in this most gentle breast so sweet a feeling.

"The lamented and envied Edward, why does he engross all of so large, so good a heart? Allow me but a share! Let the living supply the place of the valued departed. Convince me of that flattering sentiment of yours 'that, perhaps, none but a pre-engaged heart'—I cannot have the vanity to finish so great a compliment, Whose only charm is being wrote by the fair hand of Margaritta.

"HAL."

"You are a dangerous encroacher. My last had not reached your hands before I had blamed myself for the kindness of my conclusion. Werter would have lived an age in such a one; we see how it once rejoiced him. We ought to write no more to each other—it is very silly.

"I never ought to forget Edward, and you, what ought you not to remember, to make you forget

"MARGARITTA."

"Are you, then, sensible, my amiable Margaritta, of an increase of that passion I wish to awaken in your gentle breast? Let me flatter myself you will one day feel a tender friendship for me. Even reason, devoid of passion, will authorise this wish, and why need Edward be forgot? Why so frequently mention the lamented man? Yet you may love his memory and esteem the living.

"Do not suppose yourself wrong in indulging me with your letters neither; I entreat you compare me not to the weak, the passionate Werter. If my passion is less ardent, it is better founded, for who can equal my Charlotte?

"HAL."

Mrs Fitzherbert locked away the above letter and proceeded to put the finishing touches to her toilet. She had an appointment with a young *protégée*, Eleanor Lay, whom she had promised to honour by sharing a dish of tea.

A Young Blood

A dreamy girl, poor of pocket, filled with artistic cravings, who was working out her life and her eyesight apprenticed to an engraver.

"Come now," she said, some four hours afterwards, the meal being finished, "none of that dull work to-night. Let us walk together, Eleanor, the evening is lovely. It will do you good."

"Oh, ma'am, how kind and condescending you are!" exclaimed the child, gratefully. Then, as they came into the open air, she continued, "Let us go to the Steyne an't please you. I should so like to see all the fashionables, and I have not spared time for months past."

"Not this time, Eleanor," said Mrs Fitzherbert, firmly; "another time. I am not dressed for a promenade among the notables; we will go in state, you and I, when Céleste has altered for you the violet silk I promised you just now."

"Let us go to the sea, then. To the church and home by the Spring Walks down East Street."

"That will do. They will not call for me till three-quarters past eight. Only, Eleanor, we will reverse the programme. East Street first, I think."

The Spring Walks led up a steep hill now known as Church Street. It was a lonely walk rather, for two young women, though the sun was still high in the west. "There is someone behind us," said Eleanor, after a while, with the sharp hearing of one with weak eyesight; "hurrying, I think. It cannot surely be after us." They both stopped and turned. Then Mrs Fitzherbert measured with her eye the distance they had before them to traverse and made a quick calculation in her mind as to the speed of the approaching third. "We will wait," she said in a tone of dignified surrender. As he came nearer, she glanced sharply at Miss Lay. There was admiration at so mighty fine a gentleman writ large on her face, but, thank Heaven, no recognition.

"By the merest chance I saw you," he began without preamble, "as you turned up here by Couplands. See, I am quite alone. I made my excuses to the others, and they think I am resting, indisposed. I came out of the door on

the other side of my chamber and down by a servants' staircase. It is quite safe. Confess, dear, dear Margaritta, you are pleased to see me?"

The rebuke died on her lips as she looked at his flushed, boyish face. "I asked you to be careful," she contented herself with saying.

"And haven't I been? More than discreet. And I've wanted to see you so much; I have so many things to say, and you have been so coldly insensate." He looked at Miss Lay as though he wished her anywhere but where she was. Then he turned to Maria again. "After all, friendship is everything," he cried; "at least to me, for you have granted it. What a priceless boon! The greatest jewel I could have save one. I think 'my friend' are two of the most beautiful words in the English language, when applied to the most beautiful woman in the whole country, and that with no exceptions."

"A true friend would have revered my wishes."

"A true friend may be a human man. Come, where were you going to? You cannot have the heart to send me away; besides, this lonely hill is scarcely safe for you, though we shall meet no one. The cottars are at supper or a-bed, and fashion flocked in a body to the Steyne. Perhaps they are waiting to-night to see me run backwards." He laughed. "I have never felt so happy as now since the day I shook the dust of Kew from my feet for ever," he said; "and to think one might be happy like this every day, did you so will. I know you are angry, but say in your heart that you are also a little pleased."

She turned her troubled eyes to his. "It is all so difficult," she declared in a distressed voice. "I want to be your friend, your Mentor if you will, to counsel and advise you, and for that I am fit at least in one thing, and that, superior age. Yet pen and paper is, after all, a poor way to express one's heart; moreover, very dangerous to us both. It is in the highest degree imprudent to see you, for I serve you ill by involving your name with mine; besides, my husband is dead, but he left his name to be borne by me, and I must respect it."

"It is very hard," he cried, with quick dejection. "The Queen is narrow-minded and greatly biassed; I have no friend, I mean no woman friend. There are many to give me an interested love—for their own gain."

"And I?"

"You have proved your disinterestedness absolutely."

"I have told you, Sir, I have no love for any man, the only man that can ever have my heart has been dead nearly ten years. I have been wed since; but all the same it has been true to him in its depths. All its sweetness is buried in some unknown trench three thousand miles away—"

"How beautiful you are," he interrupted irrelevantly.

She waived it away. "I am only a weak and an ignorant woman. The whole affair is so difficult."

"When you could help me, your soul is so bound by convention, you so fear the world's verdict that you timorously decline."

"I fear doing you a temporary kindness and a lasting injury. Besides, after all, is it not a romantic chimera? What *real* help can I, a woman of my class, be to a great gentleman like you? I have told you of some of your faults—well, you know them, now it lies in your power, if you so trust to my judgment, to correct them, though why you value my opinion I do not know. Why, every moment, in every sentence I say almost, there must be some slight solecism that you from your lofty position must instantly perceive and secretly laugh at."

He laughed then. They were walking. He turned to the forgotten Eleanor, who was some distance behind, and evidently had not heard a word. "Let me assist you; the hill is steep," he said good-naturedly, going back to her.

"Thank you, Sir, but I know it well, I have been here so constantly in my childhood."

He nodded pleasantly; then, having done his duty, quickened his step again.

"You do not know the hill, Margaritta, and cannot refuse my assistance," he declared gaily.

"She has heard?"

"Nothing. I never could have imagined if I had been told that you and I should be walking here like this, any more than the last person in the world I should have expected to see was you vanishing round the corner in that demure brown hood."

She shook it off her face, smiling. "The haughty Margaritta," she suggested.

"Precisely. Either freezing my advances from a chariot to which a dozen captives were chained behind, or regally bending a dignified bow, when engaged in showing all the Dianas how little they can ride or look to advantage beside her—"

"Or coldly virtuous and filled with dignified disdain, a difficult task in the arms of a sailor—"

"Still the wall of ice was there even on that occasion."

The fishing boats were just putting off, they watched them silently.

Pointing to the golden glory that draped and gilded everything, he said, "I like to think that in a sunset one can get some idea, some faint reflection, of the life to come."

She shook her head. "It is too stormy," she said, "too like mortal life. Look at those clouds. They are beautiful, I admit, but are they not suggestive of human trouble?"

"I should have said the light, only the golden light and the clouds are like a distant shore. When Christian went down to the banks of the Dark River, it was not dark at all when he could see a beyond like we see over the jewelled water. Yet people when they see a rainbow talk of the promises of God, and have nothing to say to a scene like this being emblematical or full of promise."

"Certainly the evening fills one with holy and solemn thoughts; the sun at his zenith is brighter, yet has not the same effect."

"In the evening tired mankind goes home."

"In the evening there shall be light."

"And beyond—"

She shivered suddenly. "I am cold, let us not linger," she cried.

Below the hill, before the first houses in North Street,

they found Douglas with two horses coming to meet them. His eyes were steel, his salutations stiff with the mechanism of a soldier. He had come at a walking pace, for a man beside him to keep up, Eleanor's brother.

Mrs Fitzherbert stood at bay. Douglas, after that first stiff acknowledgment, sat like a man of carven stone. The girl, guessing there was something wrong, though not understanding, kept on turning eyes of dumb inquiry to her patroness; her brother stood waiting in stolid indifference at her side; whilst the Prince himself quietly examined, with an amused smile, the good and bad points of the two animals.

"Compact horse. Well groomed."

"Yes, Sir."

"Good blooded. A mouer, I should say."

"Yes, Sir."

Then he came round the other side. "A splendid coat, but rather an awkward mount."

"Yes, Sir," returned Bernard, a third time, more stiffly than before.

"Will you ride to the bottom of the hill, Bernard, and await me there?"

"I would as lief be here to protect you."

"Will you dismount, then? Robert will lead the horses."

"I would rather not."

A pause.

Then Eleanor, displaying a tact she was almost unconscious of, said that as it was so lovely an evening she and her brother would go a further walk up the hill, and took her leave, to his,—her brother's—great astonishment.

"Good-night, Nelly, dear, do not forget ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

Then the Prince, who held a winning hand, played it gracefully.

"I must not keep a lady standing," he declared. "You are in haste to get back, allow me the felicity of offering you my assistance."

She turned gratefully to him. "And you?"

"Never trouble for me, I go back the way I always come."

Then Bernard wished he had dismounted, for the "profligate" took her round the waist familiarly, and set her up, and she submitted quietly, for her rage with Bernard knew no bounds.

"It is not to-morrow morning with me," he said meaningly, looking up from adjusting the stirrup.

"No," she said, and nothing else. Bernard ground his teeth. Then, and this was inexcusable, she bent in the saddle and spoke low, so that Bernard should not hear, though it was but "Think of my advice sometimes."

"Always, always," he declared, kissing her hand. "Good-night, my Margaritta."

"Good-night," she said.

He stood with the glimmer from the sun and the cold electric light of the moon both playing on him, bare-headed, until they were out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII

MR ERRINGTON ARRIVES

"You are my friend, my solitary friend."

SHE rode home at a gallop with her teeth set, nor did she vouchsafe Douglas a word. She went straight to her room, on the plea of a headache, and was seen by no one again that night. By the next morning her temper had veered slightly. Humiliating and annoying as the behaviour of Douglas had been, she supposed he meant well, though his way of showing it was sadly lacking in courtesy. They were both to blame—*both* of them. And what was a poor woman to do, when so beset by lovers, as though she were a maid in her teens, not a sober widow? Her glass was an oval, dainty thing, the frame formed of a ring of fat cupids. As she walked to the table impatiently, one chubby personage, who was nearly overbalancing himself to see in the glass, seemed to nod impertinently. "We know, my fellows and I, why it is," he appeared to be saying. "Why, it is your eyes of blue, Madam, play such havoc. Come, look in this magic pool, and learn the secret. Fair are England's daughters, and you fairest of all."

She swept away. She was in no mood for his infantile flattery. She went to her desk as a refuge.

"You will compel me to leave Brighton," she wrote. "I am offended at your behaviour last night. Why did I seek a walk retired? Had we met on the Steyne you would have been more guarded; alas, you have not the delicacy I wished. When you talk of Love, you offer an insult you are insensible of— Your friendship confers honour, but your love—retain it for some worthy fair, born to the high honour of becoming your wife, and repine not that Fate has placed my lot in humble life. I am content with my station; content has charms that are not to be ex-

pressed. I know I have been absolutely wrong in this correspondence; it ought to cease—it must cease. Even friendship is impossible. Write, therefore, no more to

"MARGARITTA."

"You alarm me with the idea of your leaving Brighton, you pain me with your coldness. Ah, Margaritta, would it were possible to entreat the acceptance of the hand where the heart is all your own. Why is this forbid me? Cruel situation! forbid that highest pleasure that every subject enjoys. I cannot but repine! Tempers calm as yours may endure without complaining; you have suffered, you have learned to bear, but I, bred up with high hopes, for me, warm and sanguine, disappointment is a dagger that wounds most sorely. Do not, then, most amiable of women, oh, do not add to my misfortunes your displeasure for a conduct I already see an impropriety of; allow for my unhappy situation. Painful pre-eminence, would that I could lay it aside, or that I might be permitted to introduce as a daughter to her Majesty, virtues congenial to her own. To a Court, who greatly wants it, so bright an example, to the country so amiable a princess. Vain delusion! I know, and how deeply I regret, the impossibility. Deprive me not of your friendship, your valued presence, your inestimable letters, but try to give some comfort to that heart which is all your own.

HAL."

"But, no," she said. "I will not write, I've said I won't, and I will stick to it." Then she read the letter through again. And then—well, this is quite inexcusable, I can really say nothing in apology for an act of great foolishness—she went to her desk and took out a paper that had been there for two or three days. "It is not a letter," was her transparent subterfuge as she folded it, "not at all the same."

"This morning slumbering on my couch I lay,
Fancy presented to my anxious view;
The glorious honours of a distant day,
That waits to realise itself in you.

I saw where Britain's Genius pensive lies
Revolving Past and Future in their turn,
I heard her prayers with purest incense rise;
While hope and fear within her bosom burn.

Mr Errington Arrives

Thy guardian angel hovered o'er her head
  And smiled benignant on the anxious fair;
Around her soft perfumes their odours shed,
  And sounds of music murmured through the air.

Genius of Britain, rise, the spirit cry'd,
  Nor heed the slander of the present hour;
Long shall thy island boast of Kings the pride,
  And he who reigns shall long maintain his pow'r.

When crown'd with years, he nobly shall expire
  To meet the bright reward that waits his fame;
Another shall to all his worth aspire,
  My darling change—and George the Fourth his name."

"Margaritta! I *must* see you, it is a matter of the most urgent necessity with me. A crisis has arisen in my life involving my whole future. You are the only person I know of who would give me true disinterested advice, and I implore you to put aside your prejudice for once and help me, that is if ever I have had the honour of really ranking as your friend —for if ever I wanted one it is now. Meet me to-night. I will come to the lane at the bottom of your garden, quite privately, and none will know. If you refuse, I shall be desperate. Your prudery may thus blight the life and ruin the fortunes of your humble, adoring * * * * *

"It is too dangerous to write an answer to this. Ride this afternoon and, if you can come, wear a pink rosebud beneath your dear, adorable chin."

"I have had a letter," said Douglas at the dinner table, "you will never guess from whom? Mr Errington."

"Mr Errington!" exclaimed Mrs Douglas, astonished. "You scarcely know him. Have you heard, too, Maria, dear?"

"Nothing at all."

"It was to ask me to tell you. He is staying at the Ship Inn, or, rather, will stay there, for he is arriving from Bambridge this afternoon. It would be inhospitable not to ask him to honour our roof, mother."

"Indeed, my son."

"It would be a courtesy to meet him this afternoon and persuade him to come straight here."

"You are right. What coach—"

"No, he comes by horse."

"Dear uncle," said Mrs Fitzherbert; "I shall take it as a personal compliment if you invite him, Mrs Douglas. I wonder what he was doing at home, evidently aunt is not with him. He must have come thus out of his way to bring news to me. I hope it is nothing serious."

"Maria and Celia can ride with you, Bernard," suggested Mrs Douglas.

Celia agreed with alacrity. "I protest I am ennuied to death," she declared affectedly. "You will go, Maria?"

"Yes," said Mrs Fitzherbert, steadily, "I should like to go."

This was not what Bernard wanted, he would have preferred his say alone with the old man first. However, he kept this to himself and proceeded to order the horses.

Just as they started, the lady said,—

"There is a pink rose in the garden by the sundial, Bernard. Cut it for me and I will wear it. Bring one for Celia too." And in all innocence he obeyed.

Mr Errington was a man who never spoke without an expletive. He was sixty, and white-haired, his face was weather beaten, for there was not a more enthusiastic sportsman in Hampshire than he; his eyes, under bushy Saxon brows, were the shrewd sea-blue of so many Englishmen; his coat was of sober prune, and his wig exhibited none of the violent vagaries of fashion; his figure was portly and commanding.

They heard him before they saw him.

"Gad's life, you putty head, can't you bestir your lazy limbs? You indifferent, idle, skulking varlet, more fit for the stocks than a gentleman's service!"

"There's uncle," said Mrs Fitzherbert, delightedly, and slipping without assistance from her saddle she ran in ahead.

"Don't stand gaping at me. Maria! The devil! come and buss me, girl. Fair as a peach blossom, by George! and pretty as your mother was at the same age. Another! By the Lord it's a good thing to be an old man. How do, how do, Douglas. Well, Miss Cilly, been slaying all the hearts? Simon, you fool, you ass, you idiot, where is there a parlour? Strike me dumb! must a gentleman meet with his family in

the public hall, like a farmer up for the fair? Come in, come in," as Simon and another man threw open a door. "Are you the landlord? Send up some of the best port you have, and bustle a bit. My father's soul!"

"You are not come with ill news, uncle, I trust?" she said as they rode home.

"An old man likes a jaunt alone as well as the dashing young macaronis, Moll," he said, looking at her keenly.

"I thought— You have been at home some time?"

"For a while. My letters were not sent. As Gad shall judge me, girl, you are not your aunt, though 't seems, if a blood tie is wanting 'tween you, you have all her talents for asking questions. Drop it—it's damnable!"

"Oh, uncle, uncle! A guilty conscience."

"S'life, miss, where's your respect for your elders? And you can have your secrets, too, or I'll drown. Else why does your cheek hang out danger signals at the approach of yon horseman."

"Oh, Mr Errington, 'tis the Prince of Wales himself?" murmured Miss Celia.

"What! aiming at one of that wild crew, Molly. Some young Court gallant, is it? Better stick to a sober country squire, for if his coat is not so fine, maybe his heart's cleaner."

"'Fore Heaven, uncle, you are wrong, I swear it. I—"

"If I am, then, why so much heat, egad? You are not much of a dissembler, my lass." Then as the two parties passed each other,—

"Odds heart, Molly, but he's mighty affable."

"Maria danced one night with him at the ball," volunteered Cecilia.

"Stap my vitals!"

"And at the next ball again."

"Udzookers! Well, don't you try it, Miss Cilly. Moll's a sensible woman, not a single wench filled to the brim with junketing and fal-laling, her brain won't be turned by his favours as yours might be, and she will value them at nearer their worth—froth."

He had no word alone with Douglas until later, sitting over a glass of grog before retiring, the ladies having left them. Lounging back on his chair, he leisurely told a good story he had kept for their departure. If they overheard—

well, they should not listen. 'Twas less dangerous than talking private business until they were safely upstairs. Then he closed his snuff-box with a quick snap, his convivial air dropped like a cloak, and he pulled his chair with a business-like jerk to the table. "Now then," he said, "let's have it."

He had it in short, jerky, at times almost unintelligible, sentences. He listened attentively, while nearly every known sentiment chased each other over his face. Firstly pride, then astonishment, and finally intense anger as the story proceeded. When it was finished, he brought his fist on the table, making the glasses rattle and the ladle in the punch bowl clink musically, and he swore two or three great oaths in quick succession. "She can pack her boxes," he declared, "straight away, for to her aunt to-morrow morning she starts. I leave you the man."

Bernard ground his teeth. "If there was a way—"

"Make one."

The door was thrown open, and Cecilia, in not particularly becoming night attire and bare feet, came hastily in. She crossed the room and, throwing herself into her brother's arms, sobbed hysterically. The two awkward men did their best with mistaken kindness to calm her, but it was some minutes before she became coherent.

"Oh, Maria, Maria!" she sobbed.

"What is it, Cecilia?" said Douglas, with a quick breath. He shook her by the shoulder. "Can't you speak, girl?"

"She—Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"What is it? Tell us at once."

"I am telling you as fast as I can," snapped the lady. "This is enough to kill me. There was a mouse in my room, and—I—I—"

"For God's sake control yourself, woman!" cried Errington, only a little less anxiously.

"And I couldn't sleep. And it ran up the curtains and I was so frightened. I jumped out of bed and—"

"Went to her room?" said Douglas, in a hoarse voice, with an awful fear in his eyes.

"I wish you would let me tell the story my own way, brother. You maze me so keeping on interrupting. There was a light in her room and—she not there."

Mr Errington Arrives

"The damnable, infernal villain!" cried Errington, rising to his feet and sweeping his glass clashing to the floor as he instinctively felt for his sword, which was without.

Douglas also sprang up and thrust the still sobbing Cecilia into the carved oaken chair, where she subsided limply. "She has been carried off for a ransom," she declared from the depth of her kerchief.

"Rubbish!" said Errington, curtly. "Stay here with your sister, lad. I will go up to her room and investigate. Perhaps, after all, you had better come with me. Then, as Douglas joined him outside, "Bolt her in or she will awaken the house, and we don't want anyone but ourselves to know yet."

Meanwhile, Mrs Fitzherbert had gone to her room and, taking off her rustling silk dress, had substituted a silent clinging one, and not waiting to have the powder brushed from her hair, or even remove the jewels, had thrown a light wrap over her head, and hearing that all was quiet, for the servants had preceded them some time, had slipped like a guilty thing downstairs. Céleste let her out silently through a low window that had but one light shutter, for she feared the jingle of the heavy bars and chains, and could wait no longer, being late already.

The lane appeared empty; she stood rather nervously, looking every way. Then someone came behind and caught her by the arms; she jerked round her head, attempting vainly to free herself.

"Ransom, Madam! ransom!" he cried, mockingly bending to her, "and compensation for keeping me waiting so long."

She wrenched herself away. "I could not come before," she said. "My uncle supped with us; we were very late in breaking up."

"Never mind, I forgive, you are here now. We will assess the compensation presently. Did you bring the rosebud?"

"What rosebud?"

"The one I saw this afternoon reposing in the softest, sweetest, most desirable place in the world. You are cruel—I should, indeed, have valued so priceless a gift. Let us walk."

She looked at him anxiously. He had been drinking quite enough, she decided, though there was nothing in that, at least, not what a modern person would think. Drink was a gentlemanly failing, not a vice, in the last century but one.

"You wanted—you had something especial to say to me—to ask me?" she suggested confusedly.

"Time enough for that," he declared. "Why, we have only just met—and the first time—alone." He stopped and put his hands on her shoulders. "And I have wanted so much to see you, my dear human rose. You have been very unkind to me, you know, very neglectful for a guardian angel."

She attempted uneasily to laugh off his evident incoherence. "That is foolishness, Sir. Circumstances are far too strong for that romantic fancy to have long existence."

"'Another shall to all his wealth aspire,
My darling change—'"

he quoted, disregarding her. "By your own words betrayed!" he exclaimed. "And oh, if I only really was that to you, my cold, chaste, beautiful moon."

She faced him determinedly, stepping back a few steps at the same time.

"Your Royal Highness wished to see me, and was condescending enough to ask my advice," she said in a level, sensible tone. "Well, I am here to give it as fully as it lies in my humble power."

"All's fair in love and war, sweetheart, they say. You have used me cruelly, have maddened me with your indifference, my queen, my jewel! Ah, if you were my queen, or to be so!"

"But I do not understand. Your letter said—"

"See, Molly—*ach!* the pretty laughing name, I learnt that this afternoon. I had to write as I did, or you never would have come, and I yearned for you *meine Geliebte*—"

"You had no *real* reason for bringing me here like this? When I might be discovered at any moment and my reputation ruined."

"The greatest reason. I love you."

"I shall understand, then, another time," she said. "And I wish you good-night, Sir."

But he, maddened at her witchery, heightened by the moonlight, lost all self-control and caught her to his heart. "My bond! My bond!" he cried wildly.

CHAPTER IX

THE LADY IS ADAMANT

"I want a cure for love. Are they very expensive?"

ERRINGTON and Douglas, having found the terrified Céleste, and by cross-questioning her, learnt all, hurried on in Maria's wake.

They arrived at the point reached in the last chapter.

"My bond," he was murmuring in passionate tones. "Nay, dear, don't bury your pretty face; raise it and pay me at once."

"Sir—oh, I entreat you. This is foolishness; you are not yourself. Oh, it is unmanly." She drew back from him as far as possible. "You insult, you wound me so, when you thus treat me, as though I were a serving wench. I thought in all purity, and with every pure and loyal instinct, we were intended for honest friends, you and I!"

"Niece," said Mr Errington, "you are injudicious to be abroad so late. I have come to take you home."

Both started, and wheeled round to face him.

"Oh, dear, dear uncle!" she cried, escaping in the Prince's astonishment and rushing to the sheltering protection of his arm, "I have been foolish and vain. Thank Heaven you have come."

He held her with his left arm, and his right arm and hand, with whitened knuckles, were free, and with two thirds of his body he exhibited an undaunted presence to the enemy.

"I know you as regards your worldly position and character, Sir," he began formally; "but in the present instance I meet you only in what, thank God, for you, is your private one and to the world unknown—and that is a

damned black, foul-hearted villain in tampering with my niece's honour and affections."

Then Bernard remembered the sentence—"I leave you the man." He came forward. "I do myself an honour and a pleasure," he said, and with that brought his hat, seized in the hall, right on the Prince's face.

"Sir," said George, with dignity "I am at your service any time you will. I only ask for your protection that you will dispense with the formality of seconds."

"Now, if you will!" cried Bernard, wildly, half drawing even as he spoke. "May God make my arm strong, that the world may be rid of one villain more!"

She left the shelter of Errington's wing.

"Gentlemen! Oh, put up! put up!" she cried. "Sir, you are not yourself. The interruption has excited you, and justly. Bernard, you are a wicked, unconscientious man. You are letting a private wrath master you, you are forgetting the command, 'Love God, honour the King.' For that ill-fated gentleman over the water, we may love him and serve him and die for him, did he choose but come again, but all the time in our hearts we know he will not. The Brunswicker, good or ill, is our real King, and in our hearts we own it. Would you lay hands on the sacred person of his Heir? Think not of him as a man, he is symbolic of the monarchy of the whole country; damage him in any way, and, by your act, you will bring us one step nearer the black cloud of anarchy that threatens France."

She turned to the other and gave him her hand. "Hal, my friend," she said, "you did me an ill turn in bringing me here to-night. Atone for it now. I want to think you are still my friend. It is a great thing I ask of you.—Forget and forgive that blow; you can with honour. You are not an ordinary gentleman."

"It is as an ordinary gentleman that I wish you to think of me," he said.

"I can only think you noble, if you will do this for me," she declared. "Well, will you grant me an armistice of three days?" she added, as he involuntarily hesitated.

"If your friend is willing, and simply to oblige you, Margaritta," he said, kissing her finger-tips.

"Bernard—I entreat," she implored him, still desperately frightened at their lowering looks.

"I must imitate my superior," said Douglas, with a nasty sneer.

"Sir, we have the honour to wish you good-night," said old Errington, stiffly. "Come, niece!"

"Forgiven?" said the Prince, softly.

Blue eyes melted into blue eyes.

"And forgotten," she supplemented, with dignified gravity.

But, given the best will in the world, it is not always easy to forget.

"Come, niece!" reiterated Errington, impatiently.

She obeyed this time and they walked silently up the path, to the sound of retreating horse's hoofs.

Céleste rushed to her mistress, full of tears and apology.

"Give over! that'll do! plague take the woman! she will be rousing the folk. Hark'ee, silence now, and I will give thee a golden guinea, but much more of this noise and I give you notice to quit my niece's service."

Céleste recovered with surprising alacrity.

"With your leave, Moll, we will finish this subject now, once and for all," continued Mr Errington, when they stood once more in the hall. He unbolted the door of the dining-room. Cecilia was stretched gracefully on the floor. "Carry your sister to her room, Douglas, and leave the maid with her," ordered Mr Errington; "and lock 'em both in," he added in a whisper. "Sit down, Maria; it's all over now. By Heaven's blessing, we timed our arrival opportunely. It will be a lesson to you, I should think. He ladled some of the cold punch into a glass. "Drink this, my lass. Why—"

"Don't let him in," she said, looking towards the door.

The old man strode across and shut it. "He'll understand," he said, returning.

"He has, I presume, told you *his* version?"

"Maybe, maybe, but I wait for yours 'fore I pronounce judgment. Now, do you love that young profligate?"

"Oh, no no!"

"Sure?"

"Certain, uncle," she answered, lifting her head, and looking at him steadily.

"Then why, in the name of—split my windpipe, Madam! —ten thousand devils, why did you meet him to-night?" His oaths spluttered so that he could scarcely speak.

"I am sorry for him," she said in a low voice, for she would not betray him to clear herself. "He has no true friends, no woman friend."

Mr Errington laughed a loud laugh of great relief.

"Zounds, lass, if he wants only *that*—though it seemed something more to me to-night. Odds bones! he has his mother."

"She does not understand. She—"

"Oh, Molly, Molly!" He wiped his eyes. "Well, you see how you have acted like a simpleton."

"I never want to see him again," she declared, with a shudder.

"And you shall not, if I can prevent it. Wilt start to-morrow for town and stay a while with your aunt?"

"I will go to my own house, uncle, and I think as soon as possible. I will write to Percy Fitzherbert and get right away for a time, if they will have me until the affair is blown over. Now I am very tired and will go to my room, if you please; but first I have a word to say to Bernard—call him in." She rose and stayed standing by the table. "Do not leave us, uncle," entreatingly. "Bernard," she said, as he entered, "you must promise not to fight."

He answered indirectly. "Do you love that man?"

"No."

"Will you promise in return to break off all connection?"

"I go to London to-morrow and then on into Staffordshire," she said wearily. "I don't expect I shall ever see him again. I don't wish to."

"Well, then, for your sake I will act the coward's part."

"Don't put yourself in his way, don't seek him."

"This is no woman's matter."

"'Tis my matter since the trouble is through me."

"Worthless, would-be seducer!"

"That may be. You have quarrelled, you would fight

over me, but I removed from the scene—the cause gone, what need have you to meet?"

"Well, I will not seek him." And with that promise she had to be content. "Oh, Molly, dear," he continued, forgetful of Errington, "if only you had someone to protect you from insult, if only you would—"

She began to cry weakly.

"Here, now, there's a time for everything," said the old man, and bustled them apart and her upstairs.

In due course she reached Park Lane and despatched her letter to Staffordshire. Awaiting the answer, she put her house in order and made preparations for a lengthy absence, for she decided to pay a round of long-promised visits when she left Swinnerton, her first destination.

Almost on the eve of her departure, some forty hours before she expected to leave, she was sitting in her little sitting-room writing letters and final instructions for her housekeeper. The room was unlighted, and she strained her eyes to complete the few remaining lines by the diminished daylight, intending afterwards to sit by the open window and dream, whilst the mists rolled over and obscured the Park.

The room was small and cosy. There was one door leading to her bedchamber, and another without. This latter suddenly opened, and without any preamble the Prince walked in. He was very pale, and magnificently dressed.

She sprang to her feet when she recognised him, which for the moment, in the summer darkness, she did not.

"You have fought Bernard?" she guessed instantly.

"Do not be alarmed," he returned. "I have not seen your friend. Did I not promise?" he added reproachfully.

"Then why do you come? How dare you come here?"

"To see you. As for my entrance, a lackey and a waiting-maid can always be bought."

She gave an involuntary glance to her chamber door.

"I am here. Don't go, listen to me—I must speak."

"Another time must do, then, Sir. I am in no mood to receive visitors."

"No," he said, "another time will *not* do; let us end it now once, and for all."

"Your Royal Highness may recollect that I did my best to end it by coming away from Brighton a week ago."

"Oh, do you think that was the most efficient way to check the feelings—the love—of any man of spirit?"

"I was hoping my feelings would be sufficiently clearly indicated."

"You are cold and hard, yet I love you—"

"I have already told you, Sir, your love is an insult, considering the respective positions in which we are placed."

"If you loved me, you would see no insult, you would only find it natural that I should speak as I do."

She was silent.

"Is it not so? Oh, my beautiful, white snow queen, you will catch fire from me. I will teach you how to love."

"So appropriate. Do you know I am six years older than you?"

"Well?"

"That I am a widow. And for the second time, mind you."

"Well?"

"Enough, I should think, and to spare."

"I love you. That is all I can think about. I should have liked to have been first, every man thinks that, but still, that makes no difference to my love and fervour."

"You were a child in your nursery almost when I was a wife."

"That may be, Madam. I am a child no longer."

"No," she said. Then, "What do you want, what do you propose?"

"I want *you*, I want you all my very own, my beautiful Galatea that I would wake to life, for love will come, it cannot linger long when mine is so ardent. Your life shall be a heaven, you shall have jewels, such as were never seen, you shall never have a whim ungratified. Do you wish it, I will fight and conquer fresh countries, so that half the world may do you honour, for you will be practically queen and a duchess in name when the King dies."

"When the King dies, I shall in all probability be a withered crone, and you still quite a young man; everyone would be laughing at me—yes, and at you too."

He took a restless turn. "What do you want?" he said at last. "What will tempt you?"

"Every woman has her price," she quoted drily. "My friend, you tempt me very much, indeed. I cannot be too thankful, both on my own account and yours, that the temptation is not so strong but that I can resist it. I can, if I choose, go down to posterity with Mistress Eleanor Gwynne, and the goldsmith's wife, Jane Shore, company I have no wish for. But, apart from that, I can live a grand life and have everything in the world. I can be a duchess, you say, and also it is a fine thing to be the envied of half Europe by having the attentions of so attractive and sought-after a personage as yourself. Of course, when you married, that would rather dash my fortunes."

"I shall not marry," he declared. "You must know that."

She smiled indulgently. "Say not for a year or two, it would be safest," she predicted.

"Can you think of no other advantages that would accrue to you by blessing my life?" he asked, with a mortified and miserable petulance.

"I am going through them all carefully," she returned. "I am not a silly girl, filled with sentiment, I am honestly putting what I consider the greatest inducements first."

"Oh, have you no softness in your heart?"

"Not in the way you mean, for you. You want me. Why, I don't know. But let that be; and I am just trying to see if the material benefits, that are all that attract me, weigh sufficiently heavy against—against dishonour and excommunication. I should want a certain sum, and it would not be small, settled, *post obit* your father, on me. I should from the first require an income."

He went across and looked out of the window for some minutes, presently he jerked over his shoulder, "You entirely consider it as selling yourself?"

"Purely so. That is what it would be."

Silence. Then she saw his shoulder heave. He turned towards her; it was quite dark now. "Oh, how you despise me!" he cried. "I can hear it in every word you say, your speech stings like a whip. I want you so much, I would do anything, only don't hate me so. Will you marry me,

Molly? You are so lofty and noble, it is the only position I can ask you to fill; then, perhaps, you would trust my love lasting."

He knelt at her feet, burying his face in her lap, muttering incoherently and grasping her two hands nervously.

She was surprised as well as profoundly touched. "But that would be wronging you," she declared.

"My brother Frederic, he would succeed me," he suggested eagerly.

She waited a little while, then she disengaged one hand and laid it softly on his head. "My friend, to-night we meet for the first and last time on quite an equal plane. I am no longer the humble, flattered person a great Prince chose to honour before all the company. You cannot in this command me as in all else—a loyal subject."

"I can command as a lover, though," he exclaimed, gaining heart a little.

"The command would be only of effect if the love were reciprocal," she returned. "You come to me—man to woman; you bring me your heart, and, alas! alas! I have none to offer in return. And so it is 'No,' dear, and must be always no. For I cannot be your wife. The sacrifices you would be involved in in that would be much too great, even were I able to offer my whole devotion in return. If I become—anything else, I wrong myself and my husband, who though dead, left his name with me to respect as long as I bore it. I have a tender, strong, true affection for you—that is all. Try and see it in all its lights. You would be plagued continually to marry, and you would know all the time, that any moment you wished, you could be absolved from your marriage with me. And if you were true to it, you would gradually be mistrusted by the people, whispers would get about. Why, you would not be human if you did not look at your cold, middle-aged wife and count the cost. As I said just now, I am not a girl. I should enjoy, no one better, being a fine lady—a great lady. At one time I used to long to sweep about in a magnificent dress in a room full of duchesses." She gave a little laugh to herself, as though at the vanity of it.

"When I forget your position and remember only the

boy who read Lessing on the river bank, the charming-mannered young gentleman who walked with me in the sunset light and talked of the golden cloudland at Brighton but a few weeks ago, I wish my widowed heart was not so unsusceptible, for life is very lonely, and love, even if one has dear friends, is very sweet; and a true friend is what you want before everything, my poor boy, and now by your own act your friend I cannot be. I know it is best I should not love you, and yet I wish I did. It is better for you to fight the world alone—we all have to do so sooner or later; yet, did I love you, I could esteem the world, everything well lost for that love, and go to you till you tired of me, and be pleased to devote my life, my entire future to make you for a time happy. But our God has ordained I shall not love you, and so I can only say I am very, very sorry, and ask you to forgive me any pain I may have caused you through my vanity and foolishness in starting that correspondence."

He raised himself and put both arms round her waist. "*Ach, meine Herzgeliebte, die unbefleckte Seite meiner Seele kannst du nicht?*" he said.

She shook her head and the tears were near her eyes at his drawn young face. He drew nearer, and his quivering, beautiful mouth pursed itself pleadingly.

But she lent firmly back in her chair, her eye-brows lowering faintly over her eyes in an unmistakable negative.

He rose impatiently to his feet, as though angry at being betrayed into a position where he was denied at every turn in. "I will not detain you further, Madam," he said formally. "I must apologise for having wasted your evening with the stupid uninteresting affair of my whole future life. I—"

She sprang to her feet full of distress. "Oh, don't part like this with me," she said.

"You yourself have denied any other way," he returned, with the icy, biting cynicism of twenty-two.

"Where are you going to?" as he walked towards the door.

He paused with affected surprise. "I thought it was a matter that did not interest you, but, as you are curious—to the devil. It will be a satisfaction to you to know you sent me there. I wish you once more farewell."

CHAPTER X

CARLTON HOUSE

"You only in this universe I want."

SHE lay awake half the night, persuading herself how discreet she had been. This truth, all things considered, gave her singularly little satisfaction. She twisted and turned, and remembered the strained misery in his eyes, and then cried at her own hard-heartedness. She remembered herself ten years before when someone had told her Edward Weld was secretly betrothed, the horrid, dull ache, the pitiful dissemblance and pretence at merriment, and she thought of him whom half England envied, as he had knelt at her feet the night before and prayed and implored of her to relent, while she could only feel miserably sorry for him. At an early hour, she pulled back the curtains on one side of the great four-poster that filled half the room, and lay with what patience she could muster, waiting the arrival of the somewhat leisurely Céleste with her chocolate. When that damsel at length did appear though, it was without it.

"Ah, Madame," she cried, "*Ah, qu'il est affreux les nouvelles si terribles!*"

"What is it?" exclaimed Mrs Fitzherbert, sitting up hastily, much alarmed.

"*Les nouvelles effrayantes. Quatre messieurs vous demandent, trois sont les grands seigneurs le quatrieme est chirurgien. Monsieur le Prince s'est tué et ils demandent que vous leur accompagnez.*"

"The Prince has. Say it again, girl."

"*Il meurt, il s'est poignardé à cause de votre cruauté, madame* (*c'est ce que dit le laquais*), *et il désire vous bénir et vous diré adieu.*"

She threw back the clothes and jumped out. "Give me a wrapping-gown—the blue one—quick. Now my slippers. Where are these gentlemen?"

"*Dans le salon. Madame, mais, madame, me permettra 'd arranger les cheveux et—*"

But her mistress was gone.

A very stately gentleman rose impressively at her entrance, three others followed suit.

"Madam, I come on an unhappy errand. Permit me to introduce myself—"

She stood in the doorway in her soft white linen robe, with only the blue wrapper thrown over it, her hair streaming over her shoulders, her hands caught convulsively at her throat.

"Gentlemen, my maid tells me. Oh, is it the worst?"

The most plainly attired of the four here coughed apologetically, he had a pair of horn spectacles on his nose and plain silver buttons and buckles. She turned to him.

"My name is Keit, Madam, Dr Thomas Keit."

"Sir, I implore you, tell me of him."

"The Prince is in no danger, Madam," said the gentleman who had spoken first, and afterwards proved to be Lord Southampton, son of a former Duke of Grafton. "The fear is what he threatens."

"He has shot at himself and stabbed himself, though with no great harm so far," said a third, Mr Edward Bouverie. "His pistol has been secured, but when we left they had so far been unsuccessful in obtaining his dagger, and he is wrought to such a pitch of excitement, we dread what he will next do, if his wishes are not complied with."

"He is losing so much blood, although not wounded in a vital place," supplemented Mr Keit. "He should keep quiet and is raging about like a madman."

"What can I do?"

"He threatens to destroy himself if you will not consent to a betrothal."

"He has given us two hours to persuade you to decide. If not, he will destroy himself," said the fourth unceremonious visitor, Lord Onslow.

"When did he do it?"

"Some time this morning," said Mr Bouverie, feebly, and glanced at the others.

"Madam, let me hand you a chair, you are fainting," said Southampton, officiously.

She dropped into it. "I see it all now," she said in a hard voice. "This is some trick of his to get me inside Carlton House. I shall not go."

"But the Prince's life depends—"

"Gentlemen, if I am wrong before I say it, I apologise, but, frankly, I don't believe him to be wounded."

"I myself attempted to attend him," Mr Keit assured her. "His shirt front is saturated with blood. If he is not pacified soon, I won't answer for the consequences."

"Oh, what am I to do?" she cried. "Your story may be false, and once my foot has crossed that threshold I am ruined. It may be true, and by every moment I delay I further risk his life."

"Would you be more satisfied if you took your maid with you?"

"She would be no protection."

"On my honour, Madam, we assure you that our tale is true," declared Lord Southampton. "I know the Prince and understand your scruples. I know not how I can persuade you!"

"If some well-known, influential person proved us genuine. Say, Lord North?—"

"I do not know him; I do not mix in the society he does."

"But if we drove to his house—or would you prefer a lady?"

"Yes, I would go with a lady I could first prove to be of the rank she professes, but she must be of unimpeachable character—"

"The Duchess of Devonshire, she would go at once."

"I should be safe with the Duchess. Yes, I'd trust myself with her."

"Good!" cried Mr Keit, excitedly. Let us drive to Devonshire House at once."

"I must attire myself, Sir."

"No time—no time. Considering all that we have wasted already we must go at once. Your lordships, and you, Mr Bouverie, agree?" he added deferentially.

"Undoubtedly, there is not a moment to be lost in dressing; there may be a delay at Devonshire House. Come, Madam, if you have a large cape."

"Yes," she cried half distractedly, rushing to the door. "I will get it myself."

They bundled her into the carriage waiting. The term is a correct one, she never realised the imminent danger till behind those blood horses galloping at break-neck speed. Lord Southampton sat opposite her, and the whole time he held his watch in his hand. The pretty Duchess was at her toilet under the hands of the perruquier, whilst a select circle lounged and gossiped around her. On hearing their mission was urgent, she good-naturedly granted them audience at once. "You had better go in with us," said Lord Onslow, kindly. "She is very kind and nice. You will feel less dazed when with your own sex again."

They hurried her, bewildered, up the wide staircase and along corridors to the pretty and pleasant room where her Grace sat helpless under the hands of the man of pomade.

"I cannot rise to greet you, Mrs Fitzherbert," she said, with a quick glance of intense interest and as quickly-veiled astonishment at her visitor's extraordinary attire. "You must kindly excuse me. Barbara, wheel up the big chintz chair. Now, my Lord, your business—"

"Is private and most urgent," said Southampton, the spokesman of the party.

"Stap my vitals! that's a straight tip," said a foppish young gentleman and began to take leave at a great length; however, the Duchess cut him short.

"Betsy," she said, "take Lord William into the next room for an instant."

"Shall I go too?" asked a diminutive woman by the window.

"If you don't mind, dear. You must excuse my plain speaking, good people, but I cannot, as you see, retire myself."

Lady Elizabeth Foster paused near the door. "Mr Fox," she said.

Mrs Fitzherbert turned with sudden interest to see behind her the dark face, almond eyes and intensely thick, flexible brows of the great Whig, the man whom all his life she was to consider her enemy. She remembered in a flash having seen him at Brighton the preceding month.

"If Mr Fox will honour us with his advice," suggested Southampton.

The gentleman who had half risen from his chair lay back again. "To my poor ability," he murmured; his eyes telegraphed to the Duchess.

"It concerns the Prince," continued the spokesman, and briefly told his tale.

"Finish my head, Mr Rudge," commanded the lady, "at once."

"Your Grace, impossible under another quarter of an hour."

"Then leave it, I must wear a cap," she said. "I am most glad you came to me. I will be ready almost instantly, if you will retire a few moments. Charles, send Barbara in, please."

When the men were gone, she continued, "Yes, I am delighted to be of use. I have heard of you, of course, my dear. We must be good friends. I don't think you need be very frightened about his Highness. 'Twas monstrous of them to drag you out like that—Barbara, fetch some cherry cordial, and ask Lady Elizabeth to be kind enough to excuse herself to the company and step in here. You must let me lend you some things, they must have been mad. Betsy, this lady is Mrs Fitzherbert, she is called at a moment's notice to a scene of illness—I am going with her. Call Phœbe to help me to dress her more suitably." Then, as Barbara came back, "Now drink some of this cordial, my dear, as much as you like; it will do you good. You are shivering like one with the ague." With deft touches she herself hid in a mob her half-done head and hurried on her toilet, whilst Lady Elizabeth and Phœbe hastily fitted on some more things to Mrs Fitzherbert.

"Now we are more seemly!" cried the Duchess, triumphantly.

Again the wild galloping with Lord Onslow, Mr Fox and Keit behind in a hackney-coach.

The Duchess held Maria's hand reassuringly, who only moaned, "We have wasted so much time."

"We were as quick as possible. You could not have come as you were," whispered the other.

"If he is dead, I shall have killed him."

"Pooh! he is not dead yet, I'll take oath. But remember to quiet him, disarm him and soothe him, promise anything; the circumstances are exceptional, and the sin, if sin at all, very venial. Here we are."

The passers-by, the servants, everyone, in fact, looked very curiously at the little party. A sober gentleman in handsome black, of portly build, came flying in a most undignified way to meet them, his wig all askew.

"The Lord be thanked that you are here!" he cried. "He is impossible to manage, and we dare not use force, he has lost so much blood. But come up, there is not a moment to lose. He is watching the clock, and only allows himself another ten minutes to live."

Preceded by him (he was one of the Prince's principal physicians), they hurried along.

They found him in a room next his chamber. He was crouching in the corner, a horrible, ghastly sight. His face was dead white and smeared with blood, he had no wig, and his short hair was dank and matted on his forehead, and his eyes flashed and sparkled unnaturally. Blood was on his hands, his white satin breeches, that he had worn the night before, were marked with it and the front of his white cambric shirt was one great crimson stain.

The great horse pistol he had again possessed himself of was in one hand, and the dulled steel dagger, with which he had inflicted his terrible wounds, in the other. With these he was keeping at bay some half dozen-persons, of whom, besides the man who had met them, she recognised only Mr Sheridan. Nearly opposite the Prince was a large clock; it pointed to thirty-nine minutes to nine. "Only six minutes more," he was saying in a loud voice; "and she won't come now. No, no, Sherry, you keep off, or I shall hurt you, and I don't want to do that. I am not the first man that has died for love, and I won't be foiled. She may be sorry when—"

The slight movement occasioned by their entrance caused him to raise his weapon threateningly. He feared a rush at the last moment to disarm him.

She reeled in the doorway for one horrible moment, she thought she was going to faint. Someone supported her and after an instant gave her a gentle impetus forward. She half staggered nearer, the crowd opening.

"You have come?" he said incredulously.

"Oh, Sir, I beseech you, put by that awful pistol."

His eyes narrowed. "Come and take it," he said. When she came nearer, he staggered to his feet, seized her round the waist, and threw away the dagger, retaining the pistol."

"You will fly me again, dupe me, trick me, I know it. Shall I make that impossible, eh? Shall I put an end to it all? You could not escape me then." He put the barrel to her head, pressing the cold little circle into her temple. "One touch from my finger—" he said. "Shall I?—"

Death white, she never let her eyes waver for an instant, but kept rigidly, intensely still. Then he withdrew it. "You are brave," he said.

"I do not fear," she answered.

"Is't so, beloved? Beloved, beloved, you have come at the eleventh hour; you have held my life on your whim. I don't want to die—really."

"You promised me the pistol if I came for it," she persuaded him, allowing her body to become less rigid, more yielding.

"Did I?" he asked vaguely.

"You cannot refuse me, you know, if you really love me," she declared.

Only an instant he wavered, but it gave her fresh courage. She lifted her face. "I denied you, last night," she whispered.

"*Herzgeliebte*, you disarm me utterly," he cried, and tossed the fatal thing away, to throw his other arm about her. An instant afterwards he swayed from her arms into an unconscious heap on the floor.

There was a weary wait whilst the physicians, now all paramount, bandaged and plastered him in the other room.

"I declare," said the Duchess, too excited to stand still, "I never saw, never could have imagined half so monstrous a scene. I should not have thought him capable of such an exhibition. I assure you, my dear, my heart seemed to stop at that moment quite still; and you, poor thing, oh, what must *you* have felt!"

"I did not feel conscious of anything, save that if I let go control of him, by lowering my eyes an instant, all would be lost. I have a stronger will, that is why he did not. Oh, yes—I remember there was a woman crying cherries outside. I wondered if they were big ones—" She began to laugh hysterically.

"Don't, don't," said the Duchess, sharply. "They may call you any minute, and if you delay an instant the consequences may be so dangerous to him." Even as she spoke, Mr Keit came from the inner room.

"Can you come, Madam, please? and if your Grace will condescend to wait—"

"No, I will come too," declared that lady, determinedly, and Mr Keit, shrugging his shoulders, stood on one side to let them pass.

The Prince was lying on the bed, very, very pale, but they had ripped off his stained clothes and bathed and cleaned his face.

This room, like the other, was in the wildest disorder, and despite the pungent medical smell from the various washes and bottles there, a faint suggestion of gunpowder could still be traced, for he had first attempted to shoot himself as the splintered wood at the head of the bed where the bullet still lodged, proved.

"Come here, *mein Leben*," he said in a weak voice, holding out one hand, "and place yourself where I can see your beauty every moment, and know you are all mine, that you have given yourself to me." He recognised for the first time the Duchess.

"*Bei der Heiliger!* I am honoured," he declared; "but I am in poor case to receive so much good company."

"You can hardly credit the blame of that to us, my Prince," she answered tartly.

He did not answer. "Give me your hand," he said to

Maria. "No, *Schätzlein*, the left." An expression of disgust crossed his face. "Take it off," he said impatiently, fidgeting at her wedding-ring. "I will have no badge there now of another's possession. I will put my own on."

"Give me a ring. Nay, love, not one you have already. I would see one that was strange to it." His eyes wandered pettishly around. Dr Warren raised his eyebrows suggestively to Maria as he placed a concoction in a glass on a table beside her, hidden from George by the curtain of the bed. His eyes returned to her. "I want to see the mark of my sweet ownership," he repeated.

"Later—dear—" she said, "another time; I want you to drink this now and rest a while—to please me," she added, with an effort.

"Shut him up, the fool! treat him as a child, feed him on slops!" he ejaculated irritably. "Forgive me, I have gone through so much. Yes, I will drink it, but — Zounds! am I not master in my own house? Is there no one to fetch me—"

The slender hand, palm upwards, of the Duchess, stretched towards him conveying the desired jewel. "Thank you," he said gratefully. "'Tis the right size, too. Now say, 'George'—yes, let me hear you give me my name, sweet—'George, I love you, and I am promised to you, and I will never wed another man.'"

She repeated the words falteringly.

"I will drink the stuff to please you, Molly. So, now kiss me, sweetheart, and don't go far away."

"He will sleep for hours," said Warren, ten minutes later. "I shall not allow him to altogether awaken until he is stronger." He followed them into the next room. "Madam, you have gone through a most trying experience nobly. I shudder to think what might not have happened if you had faltered. I can only hope his Highness will recover to a more becoming frame of mind. You yourself need rest sorely. I will mix you a composing draught, with your permission."

"I would so much rather not," she said, looking around the room with distaste. "Thanking you all the same, Sir. I should hate to touch a thing here."

"Come back a while with me, my dear," said the Duchess. "I declare that it is all vastly romantic; you are a heroine."

"Will he—oh, will he attempt this again?"

"No, he is ashamed already, I can see," said Warren, reassuringly. "You need have no fear."

"Then I need never enter this awful place again?"

They both stared. "Why," said the Duchess at last, "don't you mean—"

"He wrung that promise from me. I never intend to wed any man, and him least of all. I never wish to see him again. I only hope I sha'n't, for I dread no one so much."

"My friend," said the Duchess, "if you really mean this, and intend to stand by it, I must say you are a singularly disinterested woman, but don't play with him and pretend to be obdurate. It is not the man that sighs the loudest at one's feet is the most considerate afterwards. I often think when I see some young minx leading an admirer on, who is filled with moans and implorings, what a store of trouble, if she marries him, she is laying up for herself, for later on he must pay her back in her own coin in self respect—with interest."

"He is nothing to me," reiterated Mrs Fitzherbert, who had but half listened, shaking her head in a dazed fashion.

"Oh, let me get away from here and in the free air again."

She drove with the Duchess back to Devonshire House, and Lords Southampton and Onslow, with Dr Warren and others concerned, followed, bringing with them the man Roberts, who was the first to break down the door and rush in on hearing the shot.

They drove quietly now and silently, for there was a dull premeditation of trouble to come in all their hearts. For their personal safety they drew up a paper of the morning's extraordinary proceedings, and each affixed their witnessed signatures to it, so that there would be an authentic record to deny garbled reports. This paper was destroyed, at Mrs Fitzherbert's own request, by the Duke of Wellington in 1834.

CHAPTER XI

AND SWEARING SHE WOULD NE'ER CONSENT

"Wonderful as a prince from fairyland!"

SWEET and fair is this dear English land of ours, and it seems most pure when it is lying under the first white confirmation that winter has arrived. Oh, ye scoffers and pessimists, and Little Englanders, before ye presume to judge, go to a foreign country and stay there a while, either as a voluntary, or an involuntary, exile—but *stay* there. It will kill all your disloyalty. I'll warrant you will find yourself, on your return, quite cured, and the rustic diction of the peasants where you land sweeter far than the most elegant phraseology that ever graced Versailles.

Leave the squeezings of half-ripened fruit and drink your own British beer, and I dare swear you will be proud to own it is the better beverage, with a thankful palate.

Mrs Fitzherbert was both a voluntary and an involuntary exile, which is the truth, though a contradiction. When she left Devonshire House on the day of her extraordinary betrothal, she felt herself unable to compete with affairs alone, for women were very dependent in those days, so she summoned a council of the two men whom she considered had authority—Mr Errington and her brother Jack. Of course, they were very angry, though that did no good, and like all illogical masculine relations when there is a disturbance concerning their womenkind, they threw heavy blame on to her, without taking the trouble to investigate any detail—that was a foregone conclusion.

In the end, acting partly on her own initiative, she wrote a letter to Lord Southampton—in it she protested against

what had taken place, declaring to him that, as he knew, she had made certain promises under great compulsion, and these promises nothing would ever induce her to fulfil. Then she literally fled to Holland. She stayed in that land, amongst those flat, dull, honest, desperately clean faces, for over a year. England was not safe for her, *he* could go anywhere in England; Ireland and France were seething with rebellion; Italy seemed so cruelly far off, for she did not want to move about. Her brother, Mr Smythe, travelled over with her and settled her as comfortably as possible, then he had to return and leave her alone.

Something under a fortnight after his departure, a man rode up to the door and demanded to see her. His purpose was to deliver a letter.

I will not trouble you with all the foolishness it contained, but the gist was that the Royal writer, having recovered sufficiently to miss her and learn her absence, implored in the most abject terms in Love's vocabulary (and that contains a good selection) her return. He said he was sending in all directions to find her, and everyone of his messengers was supplied with a letter similiar to that one. He was still very weak, and would communicate at greater length when her whereabouts was really sure.

She gave the man some refreshment and questioned him, when he had retailed only too proudly his detective feat in finding her, for she had left England disguised, and had considered herself quite safe. Therefore, to be thus traced in a month was mortifying.

But she continued where she was, for Mahomet was safe and could not stir.

The first letter was the beginning of a long and voluminous series. The Prince ran through the whole gamut of passionate expression. He was masterful, abject, commanding, imploring, followed by a period of cold sarcasm (though the letters neither diminished in size or frequency), he was childish, impetuous and boyishly despairing. He ordered and prayed on the same page, and the burden of them all was "Come back, come back!"

He accused her of being dishonourable in leaving him where he could not follow, like the child who cries "Play

fair," he painted his misery in the most woful tints, that sometimes bordered painfully on the ridiculous.

Then there was a break, and she thought he was wearied at last, but there came a letter of thirty-seven pages, declaring his inability, after all, to refrain from the poor consolation of pen and paper. It was summer again, June, and he had ridden to Brighthelmstone and arrived in the night to try and imagine it was the year before and he was following her again. He spoke of the ball, and drew sentimental pictures of it, and their first meeting. He offered to sell everything he had—jewels, plate, horses—to get together as large a sum as possible to go with her to America and "start life afresh away from it all." And to none of all these letters she answered a single line, hoping vainly that, in the end, he would see the futility of his action, and tire.

And in October there came a letter from another source. Her sister-in-law had been brought to bed of a most wonderful baby—their first. Could she not possibly come privately over and stand sponsor? Surely, she did not expect to have to stay away for ever, and a year was a long time. And *he* could not know at once if she came right through and did not stay in London or show herself to go about in the West-end, surely it would be safe. She could go away again after Christmas, if she so much feared remaining, but they could not come to her. The temptation was very great, so great, indeed, that she succumbed, and left her villa on the banks of the Zuidlaarder Meer, accompanied only by a maid, one man, and a little page, giving out she intended to winter at Groningen for the benefit of any who might be interested. She never went there, though. Free of her surroundings, she travelled by easy stages to Stade, *via* Oldenburg, there to await the first English-bound vessel sailing from Hamburg. Stade was where Caroline of Brunswick, then a girl of seventeen, was to embark just over nine years later. The packet boat, *Star of Hope*, arrived on the 30th of November, and after a wait of twenty-four hours for an overdue mail, started on its rough journey across the German Ocean. The sea was sullen all the way, and a nasty mist delayed them outside Harwich again. She landed on Wednesday

the 7th, and after one night's rest hired a post-chaise for privacy, stopping each time in small, obscure places. The second night they were to halt at Ingatestone, and then be up by times and get safe through London next day.

Immediately on their landing, along that very road a mounted messenger had hurried, he having come over in the same boat. He changed horses at every possible place, and scarcely stayed to eat or sleep, for he ran race with another bearer of the same tidings—her coming—and the reward was £50. So my readers will understand that, as she drove between the whitened hedges towards Ingatestone, a party of horsemen, headed by an expectantly eager lover, were making hastily for that town from the south.

He had no friends with him to whisper stay, or council prudence, his very nearest relatives did not know. He was in no mood to brook a word from anyone. He arrived first, and saw her drive up, and his heart leapt high, for it was to the same inn as his own. He had chosen a small, obscure one for privacy, and so, for the same reason, had she.

The chaise drew up, someone let down the steps, then, with the assistance of the clumsy landlord, she descended and stood in the winter sunset talking a while.

The sight of her again, after so weary a waiting, was too much for him. He would not skulk like a Frenchman behind the curtained window. He threw open the door and then marched boldly to the inn entrance. Before he descended the steps, she looked up and uttered a faint cry as she saw him.

"Welcome, welcome home!" he cried; his expressive face was the very embodiment of joy as he hurried forward to kiss her hand. "I did not know in time, or I would have met you when you landed. Come in, everything is prepared, though it is only too poor I have got the best the inn affords for you—" He pushed the astonished host on one side, and led her, equally bewildered, into the chief sitting-room, in which a wood fire roared up the chimney.

"You can't be cross," he said gaily, as he wheeled up

the best and most comfortable chair. You must be a little glad to see your friend."

He knelt down, and, drawing off her shoes, held her cold, small, stockinged feet in his warm hands. "They are ice," he said. "No, you shall not hold them to the fire. Let me softly chafe them. So! They are warmer already."

Here the landlord came bustling in with hot water, wine, and some Jamaica rum he highly recommended, and in the doorway lurked the inquisitive Céleste, who darted penetrating glances from her shrewd eyes.

The Prince stood up and crossed to mine host. "This lady did not expect me to meet her," he said quietly. "However, she will stay here now; arrange it all with—that gentleman who is with me."

"Yes, my Lord," said the landlord, who had the greatest possible respect for the strange party who seemed to have taken entire possession of his hostelry.

"Sir will do. Oh!"—he looked at Céleste—"that young woman seems tired," with sudden inspiration, "very tired. Take her with you, Mr Landlord, and let her have a chance of resting at once."

"*Monsieur est absolument méprisé*," protested she, anxious to see more of this, a more interesting drama than she had ever thought possible, which was now being enacted under her very nose.

"Yes—er, take her with you."

"Of course, Sir, I know. You will have dinner served at once, Sir. And the other gentlemen?"

"Speak to them, they will understand."

"To be sure, Sir. Yes, Sir. Now, my maid, *trottey avec* me." And when at last the door was shut, the Prince came back again.

"As I have come so far, my friend, you will let me stay?"

She did not answer, and he came near. Her eyes were shut. The intense cold, followed by the intense heat, and coupled with the exhaustion of constant travelling, were too much; she was half asleep, but she aroused herself with a sudden start.

"You are tired, dearest," he said gently. "Could you sleep a while? Shall I go?"

"No, don't go, the fire has made me heavy."

"How you started. Do not fear me so."

"But I do not fear you," she contradicted, smiling.

And soon the dinner came in. They both resolutely put aside the explanation she knew he would ask her for, and he, on his part, was determined to have, until it was over, and so they laughed and jested like children over the simple fare. She told him something of the large-capped Dutch in the land of canals, and he amused her with the dull dreariness of Christmas as kept by the niggardly King and Queen.

He told her about his miserable childhood, and then his eyes flashed and his voice took a firm note, as he spoke with generous enthusiasm of his beloved absent brother.

"But—" she said, and then stopped.

He begged her to continue.

"Surely it was not fair, not right, to separate you two just when you were on the brink—just when the support of companionship was most needed by both of you."

"It was the cruellest blow in my life, till you left me stretched on a bed of sickness—without a word."

"I was too hasty," she admitted, very injudiciously, lulled to a sense of false security by his joviality and honest good spirits, so unlike the stream of entreaty she was used to, but as she rose to her feet and crossed to the fire again, he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"I know your visit this time means you are going to yield to me," he said triumphantly. "Though I suppose at first you will not own it. Don't keep me waiting too long, dear, for it is so very weary, and I am so very lonely."

His assured manner frightened her as the wildest of his rhapsodies could not do. "And if I refuse *in toto?*"

"*Meine Allerliebste*, I would not threaten you."

"No, but I shudder at that awful time at Carlton House. There would be no more of that?"

"No, no more of that. If you really do refuse me—I mean—for love and trust die hard and I hope to the end if you broke your troth with me and married someone else, or keep me waiting beyond a reasonable time for the fulfilment of your promise, and that has now reached its

limit, I had vowed then to come to you somehow (only you, dear, have come to me), and ask you point-blank."

"And if I refuse absolutely?"

"I shall search the streets for the most infamous woman I can find, jail bird, demirep, she cannot be too bad for me, and I shall marry her at my earliest opportunity."

"You only threaten like a naughty child."

"If you refuse me, Madam, you will prove the truth of my words, what I say is my honest intention. De Chartres is in town again."

"That wild rake!"

"He is a good friend to me, for I am temporarily in want of money, and he has offered to lend me all I require."

"You must not borrow from the Frenchman," she cried in horror. "The King—"

"The King has refused me all assistance."

"Parliament—"

"No good without his Majesty's recommendation."

"Oh, promise me not to accept the foreigner's offer, remember your position should it be known—"

"As you wish. I will refuse on one condition, although the matter is already in train."

"What?"

"You know."

She gave a despairing sigh, and, clasping her hands on to the high mantel board, stared through her lifted arms into the fire.

"You torture me. You are spoiling all my life with your menaces, your importunities. I feel criminal when you threaten these awful things."

He went and sat moodily by the table.

"You can live a life of the extremest happiness mortal can hope for, by only saying the word," he declared, "and, added to that, you can bless poor lonely me who wants your love more than any ordinary gentleman."

She turned her streaming eyes full upon him.

"It would not be right," she persisted stubbornly.

"It would not be right! How like a woman! She will break her own heart, though I doubt your having one, she will break her lover's, sacrifice the greatest jewel life offers, to retain its petty, insignificant nothings."

She Would Ne'er Consent

"Oh, how cruelly unjust you are."

"Was ever a man in this world more to be pitied than I? The tortures of Tantalus are, indeed, my lot. I have everyone's liking as well as (and it is compatible) everyone's envy, and the one thing I would sacrifice all the rest for I am denied. And you laugh to see my heart break."

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried in a voice full of pain.

"Yes, you do," he said obstinately, and turned his head away as she came softly across to him.

"You hurt me, too, though you don't mean what you say. I—I should be the last—" She broke down utterly.

"Why do you cry?" he asked, with a bitter laugh, that was theatrical and false in its intensity, as, indeed, he always was when feeling most stirred; though, to do him justice, it was not intended to be so then, at least.

"Because—because—"

He looked up suddenly, struck by something in her tone.

"Is it *that?*" he asked incredulously.

"Yes," she answered, "for good or ill, it is that. Nothing could have persuaded me. I never believed it possible to ever happen. And then suddenly, as you stood in the doorway and I was so unprepared—"

"*Meine Geliebte. Du musst es nie wieder entsagen.*"

"Could I ever deny it again? No, all the 'fight' in me is vanquished."

"I love you all the better for your sweet surrender, *Liebling*. You have kept me waiting so long, and you are so thorough in all you do in your resistance, and now in your consent so utterly mine."

"So utterly yours," she echoed. "And when you tire? Oh, what will be my fate then? You will, you know, sooner or later, for people say—"

"People say! Don't trouble your pretty head about that, *Schatz*. We are much too happy to heed what people say. I am not a villain, though I have faults (and you shall correct them every one). You must wait to prove me. I am vain enough to prophesy you—everyone—will be agreeably astonished at me one of these days. Though I don't care a pen'orth except what you think, I snap my fingers at your 'people.'"

"And did you really love me all the evening?" with a lover's foolishness.

She laughed outright.

"The whole evening through," she declared. "You might have spared me your threats."

"I meant them," he insisted. "You have made me desperate. If you leave me again."—

She held out her hand. "I shall not leave you again," she said soothingly.

"You still wear the ring?"

"Yes, it was not yours to give, but the Duchess would not take it back. She declared it would be ill-luck, so I have worn it ever since, because it is a pretty ring, and I shall wear it from to-day because you put it there."

"Yes, until—sweetheart, let us get married as soon as possible."

Her face clouded instantly. "Oh, don't let us talk about that to-night," she said, with a weary sigh. "Can't you be content for a while?"

"Yes, for a very little while," he qualified; "and that only because I must be. You go straight to London to-morrow?"

"Yes, I was on the way to my brother's in Hampshire."

"You will not go now."

"If your Royal Highness commands—"

"Yes," he said, with a happy laugh, "my Royal Highness does command. My Royal Highness has taken command now. May I drive with you?"

"In a common post-chaise!"

"If you can endure it, a delicate female, surely I can. I will send a mounted messenger ahead to bid them prepare at your London house for your reception."

"You are very masterful."

"Are you not all my own?" he protested, smiling. "Such a precious possession, and you wonder that I guard it carefully!"

"Now I leave you, dear. We travel early to-morrow morning towards the golden city, and it is golden for us; there waits our happiness."

He kissed her again with the new air of proprietorship that is always so delightful to a woman—*at first.*

CHAPTER XII

SMYTHE, WELD, FITZHERBERT—?

"I'll struggle now no more. Have I not fought against thee as a foe most terrible?"

"SIR,—I hope your Royal Highness does me the justice to believe that it is with the utmost reluctance that I trouble you with my opinion unasked at any time, much more so on a subject where it may not be agreeable to your wishes. I am sure nothing could ever make me take this liberty, but the condescension you have honoured me with upon so many occasions, and the zealous and grateful attachment which I feel for your Royal Highness, and which makes me run the risk even of displeasing you for the purpose of doing you real service.

"I was told before I left London yesterday that Mrs Fitzherbert was arrived, and if I had heard only this, I should have felt the most unfeigned joy at an event which I knew would contribute so much to your Royal Highness's satisfaction; but I was told at the same time that, from a variety of circumstances which has been observed and put together, there was reason to suppose that you were going to take the very desperate step (pardon the expression) of marrying her at once. If such an idea be really in your mind, and it is not too late, for God's sake let me call your attention to some considerations which my attachment to your Royal Highness, and the real concern that I take in whatever relates to your interest, have suggested to me, and which may possibly have more weight with you when you perceive that Mrs Fitzherbert is equally interested in most of them with yourself. In the first place, you are aware that a marriage with a Roman Catholic throws the prince contracting such a marriage out of the succession of the

crown. If there be any doubt about her previous conversion, consider the circumstances in which you stand: the King not feeling for you as a father ought; Prince Frederic professedly his favourite, and likely to be married to the King's wishes; the nation full of its old prejudices against Catholics, and justly dreading all disputes about succession. In all these circumstances your enemies might take such advantage of any doubt of this nature, as I shudder to think of, and though your generosity might think no sacrifice too great to be made to a person whom you love so entirely, consider what her reflections must be in such an event, and how impossible it would be for her ever to forgive herself. I have stated this danger on the supposition that the marriage could be a real one, but your Royal Highness knows as well as I that, according to the present laws of the country, it cannot, and I need not point out to your good sense what a source of uneasiness it must be to you, to her, and, above all, to the nation, to have it a matter of dispute and discussion whether the Prince of Wales is, or is not, married.

"If there should be children from the marriage, I need not say how much the uneasiness, as well as of yourselves as of the nation, must be aggravated. If anything could add to the weight of these considerations, it is the impossibility of remedying the mischief I have alluded to. For if your Royal Highness should think it proper, when you are twenty-five years old, to notify to Parliament your intention to marry (by which means alone a legal marriage can be contracted), in what manner can it be notified? If the previous marriage is mentioned or owned, will it not be said—"

The reader rolled the letter into a crumpled ball and tossed it towards the grate.

"Damned old croaker!" he exclaimed, ungratefully. "*Mein Gott!* can he expect a man who is prepared to sacrifice his life itself to sit down and calmly consider his cold-blooded truisms? We are not all fishes."

Presently he rose, and, fetching the ball from where it lay, having fallen considerably short of his aim, he unrolled it and proceeded to finish it.

"If the previous marriage is mentioned or owned, will it not be said that you have set at defiance the laws of your country, and that you now come to Parliament for a sanction of what you have already done in contempt of it? If there are children, will it not be said that we must look for future applications to legitimise them and consequently disputes for the succession may arise between the eldest son and the eldest son after the legal marriage? And will not the entire annulling of the whole marriage be suggested as the most secure way of preventing all such disputes? It will be said that a woman who has lived with you as your wife, without being so, is not fit to be Queen of England; and thus the very thing that is done for the sake of her reputation will be used against it, and what would make this worse would be that, the marriage being known (though not officially communicated to Parliament), it would be impossible to deny the assertion. In the meantime, a mock marriage (for it can be no other) is neither honourable for the parties, nor, with respect to your Royal Highness, even safe. This appears so clear to me that, if I were Mrs Fitzherbert's father or brother, I would advise her not by any means to agree to it, and prefer any other species of connection with you to one leading to so much misery and mischief.

"It is high time I should finish this very long and, perhaps, your Highness will think, ill-timed letter; but such as it is, it is dictated by pure zeal and attachment to your Royal Highness. With respect to Mrs Fitzherbert, she is a person with whom I have scarcely the honour of being acquainted, but I hear from everybody that her character is irreproachable, and her manners most amiable. Your Royal Highness knows, too, that I have not in my mind the same objection to intermarriages with princes and subjects which many have. But, under the present circumstances, a marriage at present appears to me to be the most desperate measure for all parties concerned that their worst enemies could have suggested."

The Prince took a restless walk up and down the room some half-dozen times. The little gilt extravagance on the mantelpiece chimed one. He drank three glasses of his

favourite cherry brandy in succession, but that did not seem to assist his brains, and he did not, for fear of the matter leaking out, dare consult anyone.

Briefly, what perplexed him was this. Fox, the writer of the letter, was his friend. The friend of good companionship, glorious nights and merry days of mischief and escapade. He was his friend in more serious matters. Had he not fought for him to the best of his ability more than once in the House? Yes, he was honestly fond of him. And what an irritation it is that our friends will not let us gang our own wilful gait, without attempting to pull us back when that gait is in the wrong road.

If he told Fox the truth, he would be worried with importunities to reconsider what he was doing, and he did not want to reconsider. If he left the missive unanswered, he felt pretty sure the astute gentleman would come hurrying up to town and make the matter dangerous by too much advertising in his endeavours to stop it. As for the since much-discussed suggestion contained in the letter, he dismissed it contemptuously. No half measures for him. Now had come the time to prove his love and honour, and to quiet the still half-doubting of the lady. He tried to shut his mind, as it were, against all the wise advices of Mr Fox, to forget them, but they pricked persistently as he framed, viewed and dismissed a thousand wild schemes, for he wished fervently not to be reduced to the last resource of a deliberate lie.

He left off his restless pacing, and after writing and tearing up half a dozen efforts, like a girl with her first love-letter, concocted and despatched the following:—

"CARLTON HOUSE,
"*December* 11, 1785.
"*Sunday morning, 2 o'clock.*

"DEAR CHARLES,—Your letter of last night afforded me more true satisfaction than I can find words to express, as it is an additional proof to me, which I assure you I do not want, of your having the true regard and affection for me which it is not only the wish, but the ambition of my life, to merit.

"Make yourself easy, my dear friend. Believe me, the world will now be soon convinced that there not only is, but never was, any grounds for these reports which of late have been so malevolently circulated. I have not seen you since the apostasy of Eden. I think it ought to have the same effect on all our friends that it has upon me; I mean the linking of us closer to each other; and I believe you will easily believe these to be my sentiments, for you are perfectly well acquainted with my ways of thinking upon these sort of subjects. When I say my ways of thinking, I think I had better say my old maxim, which I ever intend to adhere to; I mean that of swimming or sinking with my friends. I have not time to add much more, except just to say that I believe I shall meet you at dinner at Bushey on Tuesday, and to desire you to believe me at all times, my dear Charles, most affectionately yours,

"GEORGE P."

Such was the somewhat vague, quibbling epistle that completely gulled the clever but trusting Mr Fox, who read it with intense relief, and with an easy heart flung himself into the joy of the house where he was staying.

There was a disreputable, drunken profligate named Rosenhagen. In his youth he had been a military chaplain, later, he had spent some time in jail for solemnising Fleet marriages. He was now, though an old man, resident in the purlieus of the Fleet. Dirty and unwashed, he was sitting over the fire in his one room toasting a bloater—it was in the morning at about eleven—with a large pot of ale beside him, blear-eyed and wretched, when he received a visitor unexpectedly. The man had been a gentleman, and with muttered apologies for his disorder, provided the other with a chair, eyeing him shrewdly with his little ferrety eyes.

After some preliminary fencing, the intruder came suddenly to the point.

"I want you to perform a marriage for me."

"Are you one of the contracting parties?"

"You will be paid, anyhow," returned the other, contemptuously, thus mistakingly raising the parson's temper,

who merely repeated the question, and had to admit that he was *not* the person involved.

"Humph! Your name is Colonel Gardner, and you are something at Carlton House, ar'n't you?"

"I am his Royal Highness's private secretary," returned Gardner stiffly.

"Oh! Perhaps it may be himself that wants to get married?"

"Perhaps it is," said Gardner, and took a pinch of snuff. "And if it were, Mr Rosenhagan?"

The culinary operator took the bloater off the fork and turned it for the other side to cook. "Oh, Mr Rosenhagen would decline," he said. "For, in the first place, it would be productive of important, probably disastrous, consequences to the whole nation, and in the second, which seems to me still more important, it would be productive of certainly disastrous consequences to Mr Rosenhagen."

"His Royal Highness would pledge himself to keep the matter a profound secret, and would feel bound to reward Mr Rosenhagen with a proof of his attachment as soon as ever the means are in his power."

"Fully trusting to that promise, the consequences in the interim might be excessively unpleasant and beyond the power of his Highness to interfere in; besides, a secret known to at least five or six people"— He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you want ready money?"

"Very much, as you see"—glancing round the squalid surroundings—"but with less risk."

"And you decline?"

"I do, sir."

"This matter must go no further."

"Sir," said the latter, with a semblance of dignity, "I have been chaplain to his Majesty's forces, and I believe you have the honour to hold his Majesty's commission. It is a matter between gentlemen, Sir."

Colonel Gardner bowed.

"The kindling for the instant of that old spark of his honour," he mused, as he made his way westward, "will

do more to keep his tongue still than the heaviest bribe." And he was right.

That same evening a Mr Johnes, also a clergyman, was dining at the house of the sleek Lord North. Somebody, a friend, history has not transmitted to us his name, said to him, "If I were you, I should immediately leave town and stay away for a week or two." He was naturally much astonished. "Why?" he asked. I have no quarrel with any man, I owe nothing."

"Nevertheless," repeated the other, "I advise for your own good, I cannot explain fully. You will be sorry afterwards that you did not go, for you will find yourself placed in a most uncomfortable, not to say dangerous, position."

The only result from this was that the worthy parson never went after that anywhere unarmed, marched round corners carefully, and was more than particular in seeing to the bolting of his house.

But the danger was not of that sort.

Again did Colonel Gardner, with exquisite care, fulfil his most delicate mission, and this time the tempted was more venial, and succumbed to an offer of a bribe of £500.

"No one will know," said the Colonel, "for it is a matter of vital importance to us that it should all be kept dark. It is to satisfy the scruples of the lady." But in this he was wrong.

However, on the 16th, Maria, dreaming over her fire, was aroused by Othello, her page, a grinning imp of darkness with rolling eyes and a continual smile.

He came tumbling in to announce the arrival of Pluto, as undoubtedly he would have called him, of the golden guineas, had he known of the existence of such a person.

Where does a true woman fly to on the announcement of a lover? To her glass, of course. So my lady, no better and no worse than the majority in this, arranged a refractory curl and craned her neck in a graceful arch to attempt to see something of the back of her head. Then she turned full to it again and took out and replaced her brooch. She did not hear him come softly over the carpet, or know he was in the room till his face appeared over her shoulder.

"How could you!" she cried, pushing him away. "Don't you know that that is most terribly unlucky?"

"Unlucky is what we are going to be, dearest, it seems," he returned gloomily.

"How?"

"Johnes is afraid. He has backed out. Imagine this at the last moment!"

"I saw Father Petre this morning," she said irrelevantly.

"Who is he?"

"My confessor. He implored me not to dream of the marriage, and declined himself to consider for a moment performing it. He says everyone of my own religion will decline too. Oh, it is no good, give up the idea."

"What, relinquish you now?"

"Perhaps what you said—that night—here; is best," she faltered in a low voice. "I could trust to your honour not to desert me."

"Now I know you love me!" he exclaimed in triumph.

"You wanted such a proof?" reproachfully.

"Oh, my sweet, every further proof is precious. And this is so absolute. I will not accept it. I am going to prove to you I am not the lascivious brute you have been taught to think me, that in your heart you still believe me to be. Frederic will marry, he and his children will succeed me. I wish a marriage, dear, to prove my honour for our love."

"It would be better not for the constancy of that feeling. I become a tie on you at once, a source of endless dissension, till you put me away."

"But for your own sake you wish the ceremony?"

"Of course I do. Father Petre threatened me with excommunication to-day and that I should not be buried in consecrated ground."

"The brute!"

"He was doing his duty."

"Enough of this," he cried grandly. "It is casting a stone at the purity of my feelings. I love you, I worship you, adore you far too well. It is an insult to both of us to suggest such a thing, if you cannot see it, or Fox."

"What has Fox to do with it?"

"He implores me to consider—the alternative. No good can come of a marriage—"

"Then tell your friend Mr Fox to mind his own affairs, please, and leave mine—ours—alone. Let him alter his own life before he interferes."

The best of us are annoyed sometimes.

"But I thought you said—"

"It is no concern of his!" she repeated.

"Gardner has gone now to Twickenham," he said. "There is a Mr Burt there, he is our last hope; it would be highly dangerous to try others. We must adopt feigned names."

He did not also tell her that this unfortunate man's furniture had been seized for debt, and that the Colonel had authority to pay this in the event of that gentleman agreeing, and to offer it as a price.

But late that night he sent her word that Burt had consented.

And so they were married. With no pomp and grandeur, but with intense secrecy and privacy, in the bride's own drawing-room at Park Lane, in the afternoon of Wednesday the 21st of December, 1785. There were present Mr Smythe, the brother Mrs Fitzherbert was to have spent her Christmas with, Mr Errington, grumpy and complaining and highly disapproving, but determined to see the matter carried through, if it must be himself; Mr Orlando Bridgeman, afterwards Lord Bradford, a young man of fashion who immortalised himself by inventing the smart tiger, and Admiral Keppel, the unwilling cause of the riot in January '79, who for some time had been attached to the household of the Prince. Colonel Gardner and others were purposely excluded, so that they should be in a position to deny all knowledge of what had taken place.

Burt was by far the most agitated. He kept on glancing towards the locked door as though every minute he expected it to be knocked in, and the minions of the law appear and drag him off for summary justice.

It was over at last, to everyone's relief, and the clergy-

man after a brief, incoherent little homily, set himself about drawing out a certificate.

"Your baptismal name, if you please, Madam, not the one bestowed on you by the Roman Catholic Church."

"I know," she acquiesced, with a faint smile, and signed Mary Anne Fitzherbert under the flourishing "George Augustus Frederick." Then followed Mr Smythe and Mr Errington as witnesses.

And when it was all over, they drove quietly in her travelling chariot to Richmond House on Richmond Hill. It was his fancy, because, he said, "He wanted to get away from it all."

Like a child with a new toy, he was delighted with everything, it was all such a change. Her establishment was small but well regulated, perfect in detail, yet without ostentation, as the *ménage* of a gentlewoman living alone should be. The, to him, small, cosy rooms and simple fare recalled his boyhood without its severity. The tranquillity and quietness, the little blue-hung flower-decked oratory, before which, coming on it unexpectedly, he had hung back abashed, the chintz-covered chairs, the smell of rose leaves and lavender, and the homely cocks and hens that wandered on to the front lawn—it was like another world. In this, a true German, he, like all his family, had a strong vein of domesticity running through him, and never was his wife so adorable as when, clad in a morning-gown and big apron, she went about household duties he would have before thought it impossible for a lady to perform without loss of dignity, and to which she seemed to give a particular grace.

They stayed in peace four days, whilst London, from end to end, was secretly in a fever of curiosity, and then the outside world obtruded itself obnoxiously in a letter from the Queen.

CHAPTER XIII

AND AFTERWARDS—

"How beautiful you seem. . . .
As though new risen with the bloom of dreams."

CHRISTMAS Day was yet early when my lady—whom I can call Mrs Fitzherbert no longer—rode at a quick trot up Richmond Hill. The footfalls of her horse were silent, for snow had again fallen, though only enough to powder the ground lightly, and on some places the sun had already begun very faintly to kiss it dimpling away. Out of doors there is something always extraordinarily inspiriting about a Christmas morning—all the earth seems to know it, and everything wears an especially bright look. With clear eyes and a light heart, she continued on her way till the white pillars and open gates of her own place were before her, and she slackened pace slightly up the narrower carriage way of a hundred yards and pulled up sharply at her door.

"Oh, lazy one! At breakfast still! Why, I have ridden ten miles to Merton and back."

"I could not understand it," he said forlornly. "I missed you cruelly when I woke. Whither forth at so unholy an hour?"

"I have attended Divine Service at a friend's house," she said. "I have been praying for you, my dear, that our union may be blessed, that I may prove no detriment to you."

"Your sweet prayers are answered almost before they are uttered, it seems, then. During your absence I have had a letter."

She was drawing off her thick gauntleted gloves, and now

she threw them on the table with her whip. "Yes," she said, raising her eyes.

"From my mother."

"Oh!"

"Don't be alarmed, it is distinctly conciliatory." He handed it to her.

"WINDSOR CASTLE,
"*December* 23, 1785."

"MY DEAREST SON,—Pitt has been here filled with the scandal of London, which is of you. He came to ask the King, who is vastly angry, to confirm or deny it. I saw him afterwards, and his air was as insulting as he dared make it. He told me you were not at Carlton House, but anyhow this will reach you without much delay. If what he insinuates is true—I must see the lady privately as soon as possible. Anyhow, come to me at once and alone.—Believe me very sincerely, my dearest Son, Your very affectionate Mother and Friend, CHARLOTTE.

"I can write no more, I am too agitated."

She seemed suddenly to realise more fully than before something of what the marriage involved. The principal person was standing by the window in the utmost unconcern, softly whistling "Charlie over the Water," this forbidden air being a relic of boyish insubordination, and like a red rag to a bull in regard to the King, and as he felt defiant now, so the air rose, almost without his knowledge, to his lips.

"It must be mighty pretty here in summer when the roses are out, a perfect Juliet's balcony, I do declare. If only I had known of it before, I could have come like a troubadour and sung you serenades, Molly, and you would have rewarded me with one haughty smile, if that, and still I should have felt repaid; but you could not keep me out in the cold now, you know."

She laid the Queen's letter down.

"You must go over to-day, George," she said.

"Oh—yes." He recalled himself with studied indifference. "Four days is a short duration to let a man be who is newly wed. Why," with convenient recollection—"it is against the Bible, that says a year."

She could see he was spoiling for an argument, and determined not to gratify him, so she started on quite another subject, and succeeded so well in completely distracting his attention, that he forgot all about it.

Three hours later he was in her stable. He had been planning alterations there so extensive that it was evident they would have to come entirely down. For he liked being out of town and yet so near and hated Kew of dismal memory. He paused in his erratic calculations.

"The day is fine. If you are not too fatigued, let us take the exercise of riding," he suggested, his eye being caught by a beautiful chestnut of his own that was just then one of the stable's chief ornaments.

"With all my heart, if it be to Windsor?"

"Most certainly, if you wish it."

The Queen dispatched her letter on the Friday morning, and then set herself the impatient task of waiting. At two o'clock on Christmas Day he came in, radiantly handsome, shamelessly happy. He was in riding dress and bespattered with mud. The wind had kissed the blood to his cheeks and his eyes sparkled with careless good-humour. He sat on the corner of a table and swung one leg as he chastised the other with his riding-whip.

There was a great likeness between them, such as can frequently be traced in the shape and features of plain faces and comely ones. The same eyebrows that in less august personages might be termed "lying," the same shaped half almond eyes, the same high cheek bones but where the nose of the Prince tilted ever so slightly, the nose of the Queen turned up with large nostrils and an endless capacity in its tip for self-advancement—a pushing nose, the selfish nose of a person remarkably well able to take care of herself, and not easily put down, and her mouth was large and ugly, whereas his was delicate and refined.

A strange anomaly was Queen Charlotte. She was

desperately proud of her family, and desperately jealous. She wanted everyone to be happy in her own way. She adored her eldest son, and yet such was her petty temperament, that she could not bear his reconciliation with the King, fearing for herself a species of exclusion. Of cruel and vindictive temper and sudden moods, there was always a most objectional uncertainty about her. She would accomplish endless mischief, she would honestly regret, but be too proud to own to. Just now, she was in an agony over her favourite, and she concealed it under a curt, snappy manner.

He bore her lowering air with an amused toleration.

"'Tis not your inky looks, good mother," he started gaily to paraphrase, as she did not speak. "That—"

The Queen threw out her hands. "*Ach!* Dis mad freak zat dey say, you *abscheulicher* it not true?" she demanded in her guttural English.

"*Was meinst du?*" curtly.

"Zis *nichtswürdige* woman! You 'ave marry her?"

He got off the table.

"Yes, Madam. I am married to a lady who is beautiful, virtuous and accomplished, the equal of anyone in these things, but in others I doubt her having a peer."

"But why *marry* her?" interrupted the Queen, relapsing into German. "The honour of your love would surely be more than enough—a daughter of the people—and the country would only have smiled at the temporary wildness of a young man."

"Enough of this!" he exclaimed, towering over her. "I decline to discuss it with you, or listen to your criticisms. The lady—my wife—is to be treated with honour and respect — you understand? Proportionately as your Majesty pays her attention, so shall I render my attention to your Majesty."

The Queen took refuge in tears, and he dropped his angry tones. "Mother, I was always your spoilt boy, don't take half the savour from my happiness by cold, unsympathetic disapproval. I really am going to turn over a new leaf."

"The old story," she said ungraciously. "How long

has this—person—been exerting her wiles over you? Can she be bought off?"

"I have known her since '82. There can be no question of buying."

"You will marry. You *must* marry," said the Queen, angrily. "This is not legal, you are free."

He laughed incredulously. "Time will prove. You will see her?"

"She is *here!*" cried the Queen, in horror.

"With Charlotte and the rest," he said equitably.

"That woman!"

"My wife."

"Very well. Bring her to me!" wearily.

So he fetched her from the warm-hearted kindness of the excited Princesses, and left these two women who were paramount in his life together, silently measuring swords.

The Queen waved her back from approaching, staring all the time intently with her beady eyes.

"Yes, you are beautiful," she said at last, speaking coldly and slowly, and her accent was not now nearly so marked. "So dey said. You 'ave a goot face too. And you 'ave marry my son?"

"Yes, Madam."

"You will regret zat act till ze day you die," she continued in the same level tones. "You do not know him like me; he will love you for but a while, *nachher!*" She shrugged her shoulders expressively.

"To be loved by him even for a while is something, Madam!"

"He must marry—"

"I do not think he will."

"He is a coward, he a liar, he callous, cruel!" cried the Queen, lashing herself into fury at every word.

"I beg leave to differ with your Majesty. He is careless and indifferent, but he is young."

"Already you prove 'e speakest not true, eh?"

Maria was silent.

"*Ach!* you know all I say is honest."

"And if I admit what you say, but I do not—"

"What for you marry him?" persisted the little colourless mummy.

She struck her hands passionately together.

"Was his the life you would wish your son, a becoming one for the heir apparent, were his friends suitable, his pursuits even respectable? I at least can stop all that. He was made the butt of those disgraceful men, his pocket was continually drained by their defrauding wagers. They made him drunk time after time for the gratification of their sottish humour, and then left him amongst the empty bottles to be the amusement of his own servants. They made him the laughing-stock of the country, daring him to the most senseless things—"

"In short, you love 'im."

"Well?"

The Queen walked restlessly to and fro. "You haf ruined him. 'Fore *Gott* I swear it."

"I *had* to marry him, Madam."

"*Ach!* Now I come to it!" she said nastily. "You zink of ze future of ze child. but you are no bettaire zan before, you haf no claim."

"Madam, you are absolutely mistaken. I am no light woman. I went to him as chaste as you would wish your own daughters to be on their wedding-day. I did not wish to marry him, I should never have dreamed— I met him years ago, before he was of age, unknowing his rank or position, for I have a house at Richmond."

"You are zere now?"

"Yes. Later, when I discovered who he was, my flattered vanity led me into a correspondence with him. It was of a very harmless nature, all the world might have read it. I did but entreat him to mend his wild ways. And when I found my act had been so foolish that it was getting dangerous, I went away. He gave me no peace, Madam; he forced himself into my house, dragged me most absurdly to his threatened suicide till, wearied, and frightened at his importunities, I left the country; but his messengers were constantly at my door, for he almost immediately found me out. I returned to England for a short while, as I thought secretly, but he had had me

watched, and greeted me almost at the water's edge. He threatened to find the most infamous woman in London and marry her, if I left him again, and he would have done it too."

"*S'ist wahr*," acquiesced the Queen.

"And worse than that, your Majesty, the Duc de Chartres is in England."

"*Bitte?*"

"And he would have borrowed money of him."

"*Unmöglich!*"

"So he declared, and if he had—"

"It would haf been ze las' straw wive ze King," admitted the other.

"I know the marriage is null from a legal point of view. If he wanted to desert me, he could do so to-morrow and marry another, but he will not."

"Do *you* zink to keep *'im* alway to your apron string?" sneered the Queen, with an insulting laugh.

She shook her head. "I do not know," she said. "Anyhow, he will all his life have me to come back to. No one need know of the marriage, Madam. I shall never urge it in extenuation. I wish no rank, I wish no money, but I have the knowledge myself I am an honest woman, and that is enough—"

"Zat vill do! You haf done it now an' cannot draw back. You will be punished and suffair, I never fear. I vill see zat you 'ave enough to keep your position as *maitresse en titre*."

"Madam!

"Vell, vell, vife mörganatic. But to ze country we are, strangers. Understan'? We cannot tell what ze time to come will bring, or 'ow for 'is goot I may be place. An' you? your life is a dedicate to 'im, as ze nun in ze convent to saint worship. Nozzing is too mooch for 'is abbyness, remember, an' you must forgive—ebery ting. No, kiss my face." She held up her bloodless lips. But the wall of ice between them, though a little thawed, was not to melt for nine long years.

CHAPTER XIV

MR FOX DENIES ON DIRECT AUTHORITY

"And now their love that was so secret close shall be proclaimed."

How does a hidden thing first get known? Echo answers "How?" When and where do the first whispers originate —wax strong and weak and strong again, like the waves on the seashore, according as there comes to hand more confirmation or as nothing further can be discovered.

The world believes the worst, yet the world in this case believed unhesitatingly the best, at least, of the lady, for the country from end to end was positive to a man that a marriage of some sort had taken place. The country, too, was angry, yet filled with fear. These popular feelings were expressed in the caricatures of the day, and, pleasing the people, they were eagerly bought.

It was a mean, cruel way of attacking the Prince, absolutely unworthy of the Tories who started it, to accuse Mrs Fitzherbert of every possible extravagance and incredible luxuries, as well as of trying to drag the whole country into the bottomless pit of wholesale popery.

One day, when she and the Prince had been married about two months, she came home. It was about two o'clock, and was told by a frightened servant that there was a Jew in the house who declined to go away. She found him an oily-looking man of the lowest type of Hebrew.

"May I inquire your business, Sir?"

He leered unpleasantly. "Nothing to trouble you, my pretty Madam," he said easily—too easily.

"It is most certainly my concern when you force your way into my house and decline to leave it. For a second time, your meaning, please?"

Mr Fox Denies on Direct Authority

The man became sullen. "I've been to Carlton House and been put off too often, my fine lady," he said. "I thought to run my fox to earth here." He laughed meaningly.

"You are an usurer?" she said, suddenly guessing.

"I am, Madam."

"But—"

"This bill has been overdue too long," he said doggedly. "I'm going to see him now face to face."

"How much is it for? I will settle it myself."

His air brightened, and he became more respectful. "With interest, my lady, £18,000."

"£18,000! I must sell stock, then."

"I only want the back interest."

"The matter shall be settled finally," she declared.

"I shall be pleased enough to see the colour of my money again. And if I can oblige you, madam—I should have the knowledge of dealing with (with you) an honourable person."

"Go immediately. The money shall be sent you."

"No, my lady, no thank you."

"But I have not got it now."

"But you have the title-deeds of this house—I shall be most happy. You have plate and books on a smaller scale."

"And I can raise money on these things?"

"Of course, Madam."

So she settled the bill, raising the money at fifty per cent. on the house.

"It will be but for a day or two, Sir,' she told him, stiffly.

"We will see," he said amiably.

"Abrahams!" said George, later. "Never heard of him."

"You owe him £15,000! or did—?" She produced proudly the signed and receipted papers.

"My dear heart! and you have settled it?"

"Yes, fifty per cent. on the title-deeds of this house."

"On the— Good Lord! My own sweet, your first transaction with a Jew, I suppose?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"I' faith I should think so. Never try again. It shall be paid off to-morrow, dear. We must keep this place free, and I can come to you when they seize Carlton House and sell me up."

"£15,000 is a lot of money for a person even in your position to owe one man."

"Gad's life! that's only a flea-bite to some of it. When the smash up *does* come—" He whistled.

"How much do you owe?"

"Burn me if I know. Don't you trouble your pretty head, Moll. It's not my fault. I wanted to go abroad *incog.* last year to retrench—and look for you—but the King would not hear of it. He nearly paid them about eighteen months ago, but insisted on knowing about a certain debt of honour—damn his curiosity!"

"You ought to pay your debts somehow, George," she said, with two wrinkles in her white forehead.

"Jim Harris offered to try and intercede about that time, but it's no good, and I told him so. Peeping Tom hates me, he always did ever since I was seven. He'd like nothing better than to see me have a quarrel with Fritz. Besides, I won't part with Charles for him, or fifty of him. He will never give me a helping hand. Unless I ma—"

"What?"

"Nothing, dear. An impossibility. The old man very often taps himself, though that is kept a mighty secret."

"What for?"

"God knows. He hoards up all he gets and the country can pay his expenses twice over."

That was the beginning of it, a beginning that found no end till they were finally separated. There was a long series of debts, dishonoured bills and money raised at fabulous interest.

The little extravagance of a racing stable had been started by the Prince in the spring before—that alone swallowed £30,000 a year.

Poor Mrs Fitzherbert! Within too short a time she fulfilled Fox's prophecy, and was the cause of trouble to the scatter-brained lad whom she had loved and married.

Mr Fox Denies on Direct Authority

Things were getting desperate. He was not spending so much now, but then his extravagances of the year before were coming home to roost.

Of course, his friends were all eagerly watching a chance to do something for him.

Application being made to the House to assist the King in the payment of a large debt, up jumped Fox. "It was very hard," said he, "that the King should receive £950,000 a year and be relieved, and his unfortunate son have but £50,000 per annum and be unable to obtain any help."

Alderman Newnham seconded him.

Mr Pitt was "not instructed to make any communication to the House concerning the Royal Family, and *he* would avoid the presumption of expressing any private opinion on the subject."

After any amount of correspondence, hedging, fencing and weary waits, in the first week in July the King, who had again been approached, sent final word by Lord Southampton.

"Neither then, nor at any future time, would he sanction any increase in his son's income."

"Southampton," said the Prince, "this letter requires grave, very grave consideration."

"Your Royal Highness is very wise to think so," said Southampton.

"I should like to ask my friend's advice, but it will prejudice me still further with his Majesty if he thinks Charles has a hand in it. Therefore, my dear Lord, you will oblige me by keeping my whereabouts known to yourself till the answer is in your hands, so that you can assure him on your personal knowledge (he would not believe my word) that he—Charles—has no hand in it."

"If you wish, Sir," said Lord Southampton.

His Royal Highness then ordered his horse and rode to Park Lane.

"Was ever a man so cursed, heart's dearest? What answer shall I make him? You shall decide."

"He won't help you, he won't let Parliament help you, he won't let us live abroad and retrench—"

"None of it, confound him! And, Molly, it's cruelly hard. They want their money badly some of them, poor devils!"

"Oh, we must do it somehow"—decidedly. "Now, I know you would make a sacrifice to pay this."

"Anything short of you."

"Unfortunately, I am not a commercial asset. The horses must go, dear."

He made a wry face.

"But they must, and the building and alterations must be stopped, and—"

"You don't want me to stop your new house? Why, the plans have only just come in."

"Everything of that sort," she persisted firmly. "Now, how little can you live on? I have two thousand a year, you know."

He began to be fired with her enthusiasm.

"We could live at Brighton half the time."

"Yes."

"And Richmond."

"Possibly. You could show him that, however hard he made it for you, still you acted honourably and scorned the humiliating state of debt that, it seems to me, he is anxious to keep you in. And another thing! It is not nice to say it, or think it, but these things must be faced. If you are earnest in your endeavour, and though primarily you do it because you would be free of the humiliation of owing anyone anything, it will have an unbounded influence in your favour with the populace, and that will influence Parliament, which will release you without his Majesty's suggestion—though, mind you, there will be a weary and penurious interval till then."

"What a wonder you are!" he exclaimed with admiration. "Indeed, we will do it. Don't you think five thousand will be ample?"

"No, but honestly I think you can live on ten, that's twelve with my two. If you are in England, you must keep up to some extent your position and dignity, you can't live here as Earl of Chester. Of course, you would be absolutely retired, but on twelve thousand you could *live*."

Mr Fox Denies on Direct Authority

And so they concocted a becoming letter to the King, to say the Prince, sooner than not pay his debts, was going to set aside £40,000 of his income till they were settled. A letter which greatly perturbed his Majesty, who sent back hasty word that he had not declined absolutely.

"Psha!" exclaimed Maria, in disgust. "He is playing with you. Adhere to your first resolution, my dear."

So he sent another letter to the King, and with no delay broke up his establishment, dismissed nearly all his staff and shut up all but a few rooms at Carlton House.

A mournful and depressing procession paraded Piccadilly of all the stable of the Prince of Wales, to advertise it being in the market, and then the horses were sold by public auction, realising, however, but £7000, which sum was immediately handed over to the creditors. Then the Prince travelled to Brighton in a common post-chaise.

"Different men need different treatment," said Maria. "Your behaviour savours of vulgar ostentation, but it and the mighty free criticisms it will draw down on your respected father are about the only things that will touch him. One must fight a man with his own weapons."

But small minds are vindictive, and although in one respect it had the desired effect, in another it alienated, if possible, father and son still further, for the King, with worse ill-taste than George ever exhibited, used the straitened means and fallen fortunes of his son as a peg to hang his humour on, and when, on August the 2nd, his life was attempted at St James's by Margaret Nicholson, he never took the trouble to cause the Prince of Wales to be informed of anything about it, of his safety or otherwise. Hearing of it incidentally, the young man posted all night to Windsor to personally offer his congratulations on his sire's escape, and the King, who was with the Queen when he arrived, left her, declining to see him.

But they met accidentally before the Prince quitted the castle and then he offered a slight remonstrance. The King looked at him dourly. "Unwelcome guests are best denied," was all he vouchsafed, and shambled awkwardly on,

slamming a door behind him. To a sensitive nature the effect of a scene like this can better be imagined than described.

And in the autumn came George's most evil of all his evil influences. He who was Duc de Chartres and now was Duc d'Orleans, and who could not understand the new state of affairs at all, a second time pressed money on his friend, a bitter temptation to the Prince, who, finding it impossible to live on his ten thousand, was again in debt.

The rumour reached the Duke of Portland, and he wrote in great alarm to Sheridan, who answered that he had also heard it, and in a mixed company of French and English. Details are not known, but Sheridan and afterwards Fox were in the end able for a while to deter the Prince from accepting the offered loan.

After a meeting to discuss the business at Mr Pelham's, where it was decided that good might be done by bringing the matter before the House, thus verifying Maria's assertion, the Prince and Mr Fox walked quietly to Carlton House.

"I want to ask a very serious question, your Royal Highness."

"Well, Charles?"

"Did you take my advice just over a year ago?"

"What advice?"

"About—marrying?"

"Oh! Yes."

"On your honour, Sir?"

"Egad, Charles, can't you trust my word?"

"Your word is, of course, as good as your honour, so you can have no objection to give me both, Sir."

"What a troublesome fellow. Well, then, Charles, on my honour."

"You have been through no form of marriage?"

"I have been through no form of marriage."

Mr Fox drew a long breath of relief.

On the 20th of April Alderman Nathaniel Newnham, the Member for the City, asked the Minister, Mr Pitt, "Whether

he proposed to take any steps to relieve the Prince of Wales from his embarrassed and distressed situation.

MR PITT replied,—"I have had no commands from the King on the subject."

ALDERMAN NEWNHAM.—"Then I give notice I shall bring forward a motion on the subject to which I hope the House will cordially agree."

Two or three days after Mr Pitt "wished to know the shape and purpose of the honourable Member's proposed motion."

ALDERMAN NEWNHAM.—"I regret at this moment I cannot furnish you with details, Sir."

MR ROLLE (Member for Devonshire).—"I consider that an investigation of the matter involves many questions of consequence affecting both Church and State."

MR PITT.—"Considering the delicacy of the question and the private knowledge I possess, I am particularly anxious that an investigation should be avoided. But if it is absolutely determined to bring the motion forward, however it may pain me as an individual, I shall discharge my duty to the public."

Then he feared he had said too much, and the next morning dispatched Lord Southampton to the Prince, with apologies and explanations, who, however, sent back word that he "never received verbal messages except from the King."

On the 27th

ALDERMAN NEWNHAM said in the House,—"I wish to inform the House that the motion I intend to make will be to the following effect: That a humble address be presented to his Majesty, praying him to take into his Royal consideration the present embarrassed state of the affairs of the Prince of Wales, and to grant him such relief as his Royal wisdom shall think fit, and that the House will make good the same."

Other Members on both sides having expressed an earnest desire that the matter might be allowed to drop, or be dealt with in some other way.

MR SHERIDAN.—"The insinuations and menaces that have been thrown out on a former occasion make it

impossible for his Royal Highness to recede with honour. And I have the highest authority for stating that his Royal Highness is ready in another place, as a peer of Great Britain, to give the most direct answers to any questions that may be put to him."

MR ROLLE.—"If this matter is persisted in, I shall state without any reserve my sentiments on the subject."

ALDERMAN NEWNHAM.—"I see no danger and the Prince sees none. He is not to be intimidated."

MR FOX (after speaking for some duration on the debts, and declaring there was no correspondence that was secret or that might not be read) concluded:—"If allusion were made to a certain low, malicious rumour which had been industriously propagated without doors, I am authorised to declare it to be a falsehood. I should have thought that a tale fit only to impose on the lowest of the vulgar could not have gained credit for a moment in this House or with anyone who possessed the most ordinary portion of common-sense or reflection, but when it appears that an invention so gross and malicious, a report of a fact it is absolutely impossible to have happened, has been circulated with so much industry and success as to have made an impression on the minds of the Members of the House, it but too clearly proves the uncommon pains taken by the enemies of his Royal Highness to depreciate his character and injure him in the eyes of his country."

MR ROLLE.—"The right honourable Member has said the fact alluded to is impossible to have happened. We all know, indeed, that there are certain laws and acts of Parliament which forbid it, and make it null and void, but still, it may have taken place, though not under the formal sanction of the law; that is the point I wish to be satisfied upon."

MR FOX.—"Though what I said before is, I think, sufficient to satisfy every liberal and candid mind, I am willing, if possible, to satisfy the most perverse. When I deny the calumny in question, I mean to deny it not merely with regard to certain existing laws, but to deny it in point of fact as well as law. The fact not only never could have happened legally, but never did happen in any way

whatsoever, and it has from the beginning been a base and malicious falsehood."

MR ROLLE.—"Does the honourable Member for Westminster, in what he last said, wish it to be understood by the House that he speaks from direct or indirect authority?"

MR FOX.—"*From direct authority, Sir.*"

That clenched it. An overwhelming victory for the Prince at the cost of his wife and his friend.

When the debate was over, Mr Fox dropped into Brookes' for half an hour's play. He had been there some time, in fact was just leaving, when a very foppish young gentleman, indeed, strolled leisurely in and over to their table (they were playing faro), annoying the players by persisting to talk. So much, indeed, that they broke up. The macaroni put himself into step with Fox. "Let me affer you, Sir, my snaff bax," he observed, with a languid drawl.

Not to be discourteous, Fox, with a slight inclination of his head, accepted.

"Haw, I hear that you denied the marriage of the Prince and the widaw?"

"And what then, Sir?"

"As Gad shall jedge me, my dear Fax, you're wrong. Strike me speechless if you're nat."

The other rumpled his wig fretfully. "I've been through all this once, Bridgeman, to-night. I *know* there was no marriage."

"Lard, Fax! burn me if there is any reason to agitate yourself. But in this case, you see, all the denial in the waurld won't help you. Strike me dumb if it will, becas I was present myself at it, at the lady's tawn hause."

CHAPTER XV

THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF THREE DUCHESSES

"I have set that on which now I cannot stay."

MARIA had been spending a quiet evening with Mrs Butler, her friend—the Susie Fielding of old.

Her chair was to fetch her at twelve o'clock, but instead a coach of an unmistakable build, with coachmen and footmen in a gaudy scarlet livery, was awaiting her.

A wretched, half-starved looking link boy tried to push past one of the magnificent supercilious lackeys, who beat him roughly back with a long wand he carried, and she paused to give him something in charity before stepping in. The door shut on her.

"You didn't expect me," said George, already an occupant of the coach.

"No. Is it anything important that has brought you? I would have stayed at home if I had expected you."

"Oh, no, nothing. Did you play to-night? What luck did you have?"

"Fair. I lost ten pounds and won twenty. I don't believe in playing high."

"There is no interest otherwise," he dissented.

"Enough for us in our quiet way to-night; besides, Susie is not rich. I am so glad you came, I particularly wanted to see you. You know that big diamond you gave me last month? I have had it cut in half—half for you and half for me," she laughed. Then, putting her hand in the bosom of her dress, "I wanted it done for the 23rd of April."

"Why then?"

"Fie! The day of your patron saint, St George for England. But never mind, here it is now." She handed him a tiny miniature of herself, less in size than a halfpenny, it was covered by half the famous diamond and set with brilliants round it. "I have had a companion one of your portrait done for myself."

"Thank you a thousand times, *mein liebstes Kind.* You are far more good to me than I deserve." He frowned at it in the poor light to better examine it. "I cannot see properly"—leaning back again—"but it does not seem to half do you justice, Moll."

Shortly after they turned into Park Lane.

"I can't stay to-night, dear love. I only really came to tell you that!—and so absurd—that zany Fox actually denied to-night in the House that we were man and wife!" He laughed boisterously.

"Denied in public! Dragged my name like that before everyone! How *dared* he!"

"I' faith I was as angry as you. I knew nothing of it. Well, you can believe I didn't. It was entirely on his own responsibility. He never has said a word to me."

"Before we were married he did."

"Oh, yes, then. Never since."

"My whole character is blasted! I stand proclaimed a woman of shame!"

"You feel too strongly on it, *Kleine.* It will die down. It's over now. People will forget it."

"Die down! In twenty years, perhaps. George, you must move heaven and earth for my sake, for your own sake, to reinstate me."

"For *my* sake—" He began and did not finish it for a moment. "For my sake it is good."

"How?"

"The marriage is the one reason why Parliament won't grant the money. Why my father won't," he said brutally. "In marrying you I did for myself utterly, fool that I was!"

"It must be contradicted!"

"I shall do nothing in the matter," he continued coldly. "This has happened without my wishes, certainly, but I should be a fool not to take advantage of it."

Then they arrived at her door, and with an airy good-night he drove away.

If the whispers of the marriage had caused excitement, it was nothing to the fever that convulsed London the next day. From end to end the talk was of nothing else.

Mrs Butler heard when her lord came home, and although her friend was now a very great lady and much above her, yet in her kindly heart she rushed round at eight o'clock. She ran a race with others, who all came eager to assure Mr Fox's victim of their unbounded confidence in her. By ten o'clock Mrs Douglas from Highbury had arrived, there was a continual stream. In Mrs Fitzherbert's own words, "The knocker of my door was never still the whole day."

Susie stayed on doggedly and firmly all the time, and, watching from the window, announced the fresh arrivals. Just as the Highbury contingent were departing, she gave a cry that brought Maria—pale, cold, dignified and stately—to her side. In this the Prince's family were atoning for him. The Duchess of Cumberland had arrived in full state!

She stayed but a short time, and, of course, made no allusion to what had brought her, but its meaning was sufficiently plain, and she particularly exerted herself to be charming, sympathetic and fascinating.

Half an hour after her departure, by twelve o'clock, another great lady arrived with a flourish, the kindly, impulsive, warm-hearted Duchess of Devonshire.

"La! child, I should have been here ages before, if I had had my own way," she declared, with friendly kisses and in an affectionately eager way. She was the first person to boldly broach the subject. "You must not blame Charles Fox, you know," she said at once.

"Who am I to blame but him, who can I blame but him?"

"There is something underneath it all, *ma petite*," surmised the Duchess, shrewdly. "It is not like Charles, the very last thing in the world he'd do, to attack a woman unprovoked."

"Even that being true, I can't pronounce judgment in his favour. One must be involved dishonourably. My—the Prince declares he knew nothing whatever about it. I must believe him."

"He was very angry at it, I suppose," said the Duchess, carelessly, intent on brushing something imaginary from her skirt. "When did you see him?"

"Last night. He professed himself very angry."

"What is he going to do to clear your honour?"—looking up quickly.

Maria was silent.

"Ah, that proves at least his complicity. Nothing, then?"

"But you see, Duchess, I must believe him before anyone."

"Of course you must, dear, but don't blame my poor Charles, all the same, when you know it was not him."

"But I do blame him, honestly. I believe that he did do it and of his own initiative. He always hated me and longed to humiliate me. He did his best to persuade the Prince to live with me without marrying me." She was walking about the room now with clenched hands. They were alone, and this was the first time she had spoken on the subject to a soul. "I hope he is satisfied now he has rolled me in the gutter like a common street-walker. George is not perfect, he has his faults, but I would sooner trust him any day than Fox."

"And I have known them both longer than you, my dear; in fact, Mr Fox is hardly known to you at all—and my opinion is different, and you will find I am right," said the Duchess, warmly, shaking out the folds of her skirts as she rose to leave. "However. Will you ride with me tomorrow morning? Shall I call for you?"

Ere the day closed, the Duchess of Portland had also paid a ceremonious call, and a dense crowd the whole afternoon was coming and going.

It is not every calumniated lady, placed even in so exceptional a position, who would have received the support of three women of such influence as the wife of

a Prince of the Blood and two duchesses. The case, indeed, is probably without parallel.

Mothers brought their young daughters and, better still, sent excuses by them. It was a complete triumph.

It was over at last. The final carriage had driven away, for people dined at five and six o'clock in those days. There was quietness at last; the house was silent again.

"I shall go and lie down, Susie. I did not sleep particularly well last night, and I want to look fresh presently.

"Don't do too much, dear."

"Nonsense. It would be highly discourteous not to go when Lady Henry especially came to remind me."

As they crossed the hall, they met the Prince.

"Are all those old tabby cats gone at last?" he said. "I have been here once before to-day."

"I am going to my room, I am tired," she returned coldly, linking her arm in Mrs Butler's. "I want to rest until I start for Lady Henry Beresford's rout."

"Can't you give it up?"

"But I do not wish to."

"S'life, Moll! I have something to say to you."

"I don't know what. I think, Sir, you said *everything* last night. Come, Susie." She opened her fan and moved leisurely up the stairs.

He went home greatly flurried and sent post-haste for a Mr Grey, who was a very young Whig and who had been in the House less than a year as representative of Northumberland. This gentleman, afterwards Lord Grey, an ardent Foxite, although astonished, never dreamed of questioning the statement of his principal the night before.

He found the Prince tearing up and down the room at express rate like a madman.

"Have you seen Charles to-day?" was the first question.

Mr Grey said he had.

"What did he say?—anything about me? How did he seem?"

"Mr Fox seemed perturbed, your Royal Highness, as

though he had something on his mind. He scarcely spoke to me."

"Oh. Hark'ee, Grey, he went too far last night. I want you to explain—"

"What, Sir?"

"Tut, tut! Can't you understand? Women, you know, are kittle cattle."

"Mr Fox must unquestionably suppose he had authority for all he said, Sir. If you were to send for him, you could set right the matter that is misunderstood. I—I don't understand."

"Plague take the man! Don't you see the lady is naturally and justly very angry at what happened last night. I want something, anything said—you know—vaguely—but to quieten her."

"The matter, Sir, is one of such extreme delicacy, I hardly like to intrude my poor opinion," said the young man, distressedly; "but couldn't she be persuaded to see that—that—it was for your benefit, and as for actual legality, why, she has no claim."

"What a fool you are, Grey. I am a man of honour. There was a sort of—just to ease her conscience, you know—"

"There *was* a marriage!" cried Grey, horrified, and seeing at last.

"A sort of ceremony, yes," corrected George.

"Oh, Sir, the matter is between you and Mr Fox, I cannot possibly interfere. No other person can without questioning Mr Fox's veracity, and—loyally—no one will presume to do that."

"You decline, Grey?"

"Yes, your Royal Highness, I respectfully decline."

The Prince, much annoyed, turned away, throwing himself on a sofa. "Sheridan must say something, then," he muttered.

"You must excuse my suggesting to your Royal Highness that great damage will be done to your own cause if the matter is kept before the House."

"Yes, yes. That will do, Grey."

In due time Pitt, who had to (inwardly) own himself

defeated, had an interview at Carlton House with his enemy. A cabinet council followed, and the King, after endless shilly-shallying, such, indeed, we are told as disgusted Pitt himself, at last in the middle of May wrote that he would consent to the payment of the debts on the Prince engaging not to contract any more, and set forth, as well as the amount, how each one was contracted, but that he did not think an increase of income necessary so long as the Prince was unmarried.

The debts amounted to £193,648, exclusive of the £25,000 debt of honour that had been the bone of contention before, and others of a similar nature. £161,000 was voted for the payment of the debt and £60,000 for the completion of Carlton House. Pressure being brought to bear, his Majesty consented to increase the income from his own Civil List by £10,000.

Anyone can see this was utterly inadequate. However, it served for a short time. The father and son "made it up," and the delinquent was present at the Drawing-room, May 24, and was received into the bosom of the family again.

As for the two people sacrificed. Fox, after doing his best in pulling the matter through of the money and debts, was so angry, he broke off all friendship and intimacy till his help was imperatively needed eighteen months later. He did not speak to the Prince for a year. Ostentatious patronage in public places and letters signed "ever affectionately yours" are not everything. Though he might have spared his indignation, George quickly forgot his own part in the transaction and thought "dear Charles" remarkably disagreeable and unkind and himself a most ill-used person.

And Maria? Sheridan did "say something" that might be described with equal truth as anything or nothing. A vague, meandering stream of compliment, absolutely out of place regarding her in either an innocent or guilty light; it neither supported nor contradicted Fox's statement, and was ridiculously impossible in every way.

It was an acknowledged piece of etiquette now that wherever the Prince of Wales was entertained *she* must be invited without fail, fashionable London accepting this unwritten law. In due course, she received an invitation to a

ball and supper given by a Sir Sampson Gideon. She accepted, for it was her policy to be seen everywhere to give the lie direct to the imputation on her honour.

The Prince was there, gay, debonair, graceful, sparkling. His attentions were most marked, yet delicate and refined, the services of a lover. She found herself on his right hand at the supper table.

But the triumph was to come. His carriage being announced, he came, with a most matter-of-fact air, and offered her his arm, leading her before the interested eyes of everyone present to make adieux to the hostess and then down the wide marble stairs, handing her in and getting in after her like any common-place husband, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

"*Lass uns es alles vergessen*," he said, "*vergib mich. Wir wollen wieder anfangen.*"

"Yes," she said. "We must begin again. And I will try and forget it, dear."

CHAPTER XVI

THE KING IS ILL!

"Sir, I will love him; is he not my brother?"

IT was a select little supper party one sultry August night, with the air hot and caressing, and the night without breathless at its own loveliness, when the musical wash of the sea, heard faintly in the stillness, sounded like the soft rhythmatic throbbings of a beloved one's sleeping breath.

Sparkling wine and sparkling wit, delicate food and dainty, charming women were there. Light laughter rang out into the night, though jarring on the solemn beauty as a tinkling gavotte played in a cathedral, for the open world, when its care is laid aside for a while, and we dimly realise it as it first was, is infinitely holier than any four walls and a roof, however ornate.

England's heir held high revel in his new Pavilion by the Brighton waves.

A motley group was assembled—he never could bear dulness—with sharpened brains and humour strung to concert pitch, some mighty brilliant *mots* were born that night.

They were all there, that "wild crew" of whom we have heard so much. The Barrys with their extraordinary nicknames. Hellgate, the eldest hope of the family. "His Lordship was alternately hovering between a gentleman and a blackguard; equally well known in St Giles's and St James's. He could discourse slang as trippingly as French, relish porter after port, and compliment her ladyship at a ball with as much ease as he could bespatter blood in a cyder cellar."

The Hon. Henry Barry also. He was club-footed, and rejoiced in the cognomen of Cripplegate on that account.

The King is Ill!

The genial Sherry, the Duke of Queensberry, Lord Abergavenny, Lord Egremont, of Turf fame, Mr Charles Grenville, and his friend, Mr Orlando Bridgeman, bored to extinction (he would have appeared so in an earthquake), the assertive Mr Philip Francis, the new favourite, Jack Payne, and all the rest of them.

Maria, five years before her very existence unknown to these people, was playing hostess (as it was quite private), with a cool, refined ease. Madame la Princesse de Lamballe (Marie Thérèse Louise de Savoie-Carignan) closest confidante of the French Queen, Marie Antoinette, escaped for a time from the unheeded low growl, waxing steadily stronger, of dissatisfied France, a brilliant woman of the vivid ripeness of thirty-eight. Mrs Francis, the Duchess of Cumberland, for the *nonce* minus her lord "Cecilia." Sheridan, becomingly adoring, and it is only fair to add adored, for the morals of the great wit bore the nicest comparison to some of his best friends.

"The reason," he said, "why Sir William did not come is that his sister, an invalid, has arrived."

"La! an intrigue! His *sister!*"

"Oh, she is his sister," protested Sheridan. "I've seen her."

"Oh! So bad as that?"

"Lard, yes. Her features are so unfortunately formed that she could never dissemble or put on sweetness enough to induce anyone to give her occasion to show her bitterness."

"Been kept too long and gone sour?"

"She would be safe in a barracks. I never saw a woman to whom you would so readily give credit for perfect chastity, your la'ship."

"This Sir William," said the Southern lady, using her languorous eyes effectively, "do I know him?"

"I swear you must, Madam, a long, lean man, all his limbs rambling, no way to reduce him to a compass unless you could double him up like a pocket rule. When his wife's by, he follows like a note of admiration. See them together! one's all mast, the other all hulk. When they part, you wonder to see the steeple separate from the chancel."

"Fill Mr Sheridan's glass," said the Prince. "What wine do you prefer most of all, Dick?"

"Other people's," answered the gentleman, promptly.

"But, Mr Sheridan," said Maria, "you really ought not to drink so much, you will destroy the coat of your stomach."

"Then, Madam, my stomach must take to its waistcoat."

"The canversation is rapidly becoming impraper," objected Mr Bridgeman, plaintively.

"Have you ever seen my play, *A Trip to Scarborough*, Sir?"

The room tittered.

"'Fore Gad, let's drap it."

"*Si*," said the Princess, with her pretty accent. She was immensely struck with Sheridan, but hardly understood the last remarks.

"How lovely the night is!" murmured Mrs Francis, sentimentally, looking towards the open window.

"*Si, si*," repeated the foreign lady. "To-day when I rode—it was the same. Oh, I *luv* a canter before dinner, do you, Mistaire Shairy?"

"Your Highness, I prefer a *de*-canter after dinner."

A sort of movement was made.

The older male guests, headed by the Duke of Queensberry, a snappy, wizen little shrew on the wrong side of sixty, were longing for the absence of the women, so that they could settle down to a night of it; the younger generation was undecided, there were charms for them either way.

Suddenly, it was noticed the Prince of Wales had withdrawn, so Maria marshalled her ladies off into the withdrawing rooms, where innumerable candles in mirror frames gave double light through the reflection, and shone from glass-hung chandeliers descending from the high, round ceiling. The card tables were already set out.

The Prince followed almost immediately. He was overwhelmed with the intensest excitement. He made straight, filled with apologies, for the Princess. "Urgent business, Madame, calls me to Windsor," he explained in his liquid,

perfect French, "to my brother, of whose arrival I have just received announcement."

When he had gone, the women, headed by the eager, impatient Duchess of Cumberland, drew to the tables, and played *ombre* to the accompanying faintly-heard shouts of ribald songs till the dawn broke, and servants brought in hot, frothing chocolate.

All night the Prince posted to Windsor, and on the second day returned from thence with a slight, refined, plain edition of himself (a specimen of florid healthiness), who stooped a little, and yet had a spritely, lively bearing. This was his brother.

The phaeton and three with its one postilion dashed through the summer dust till it drew up before the house on what is now known as Pavilion Parade. Both young men jumped to the ground, and George rushed in with the impetuousness of a schoolboy, his brother following at his heels.

"*Gutes Fräuchen!*" cried he, bursting without ceremony into the room where, with the aid of an old-fashioned harpsichord, Maria was singing softly, trying over by herself the principal airs from the opera of *Iphigenie en Tauride*, by the composer Christoph Gluck, that a few years before had set Paris on fire, and had been lent her by the Princesse de Lamballe. He took her in his arms and kissed her. "Here he is at last, the reprobate, the laggard, for whom we have waited so long. Welcome him warmly, lass, he is your brother."

"I am indeed pleased to welcome you and you willing. I hope we shall be friends," she said, with pretty hesitation.

George looked on with an air of proud proprietorship, mingled with that of a showman. "Kiss her, Brother."

So the Duke of York kissed her on each cheek, and a life-long friendship was thus cemented.

In the spring of '88, on the 13th of February, the long, weary trial of Mr Warren Hastings, that was to drag its tedious length seven years, opened in Westminster Hall.

Excitement ran fever high, cooled down and burnt up again, all through the spring, but, as the summer waned there was a fresh topic for Rumour to set agoing, the wildest inaccuracies were noised about, and idle folk were agitated and all excitement to learn the latest news regarding it.

Abandoning his beloved Weymouth, the King in the month of June paid a visit to the town of Cheltenham, where, be it noted, he attended the theatre, and the young actress who had the honour of performing before him on that occasion was Mrs Nell Jordan.

He, unfortunately, caught a severe cold, being overtaken in a thunder shower when riding, attended by Lord Derby, some long distance from home, and getting wet through. This cold hung about him persistently, and in the middle of October it began to be whispered at Brookes' and White's that his Majesty was really worse than was given out. Then the Prince, who was at Brighton, was hurriedly sent for. The King would ride for hours in the rain every day. He went to town to hold a *levée* in a high fever, no one daring to say him nay. He walked about all night, ever talking, ever talking, till he became inaudible from hoarseness, and the Queen and his attendants followed him and tried to hide, and annoyed him still further. George arrived to find there was still a semblance kept up, a pitiful pretence that nothing was wrong. The King would speak wildly, incoherently, asking questions more than ever. And a horrible effort was made to treat him as a rational being.

The miserable, anxious family, reinforced by the Duke of York, were seated at the table making poor pretence to eat when his Majesty started to his feet, seized his hated eldest son by the collar and flung him violently against the wall.

"You shall know if you dare to prevent the King of England from speaking out!" There were screams from the Queen and Princesses; everyone was paralysed, horrified. No one seemed to have courage to interfere, although it looked as though his Majesty would really do the Prince some mortal injury, for the latter, on his part, from astonishment and the fear of hurting his

father, seemed incapable of raising a finger in his own defence.

Fortunately, the demented man's attention was attracted by some movement of the Duke of York, and, recognising him, he exclaimed piteously, leaving the object of his enmity, "Frederic, oh, Frederic, you are my friend!" and fell sobbing into his arms.

Oh, the awful days that followed! The Queen was useless, the King not expected to live, and the Prince of Wales, literally at a moment's notice, was thrust into a position in which everyone turned to him, yet he had no power, though it was of vital necessity that he should display the strong hand he dared not use. It was seen that the King might recover, when the Prince would, of course, be most severely reprimanded and violently execrated for using power before it was his, and attempting most indecently to step into his father's shoes before they were vacated.

In such a case, every order he gave during the trying time would be carped at, criticised, and given an evil meaning.

Never was a man more mazed and bewildered than he; the Duke of York was still more helpless; the third brother, Prince William, was at sea. Sheridan was very willing, but Sheridan was no genius in such matters, and it wanted little short of genius to steer the craft of the Prince's fortune through this most difficult sea. Jack Payne, a sailor, had his confidence next, "a jolly good fellow," and also a bit of a place-seeker and toady, and still more unsuited for a position of influence. Charles Fox was in Italy; there was the Commander-in-Chief, the general who was so earnestly wanted to control with his master-hand all this disorganisation. Would he come? Where was he? Messenger after messenger was dispatched imploring his return.

It was at first thought the King's death was imminent, but he was pulled through a sharp attack and recovered his health, only to be found hopelessly insane. He dressed as a Quaker and prattled of his boyish love—Hannah Lightfoot. He alternately reviled and, in exaggerated terms, praised the

Queen. He declared London was under water and said he was the Prime Minister.

The throne was not vacant yet—though he who occupied it was incapable of transacting business. There was no power vested anywhere to hurry forward the meeting of Parliament which was prorogued until the 20th of November. On that date it was expected that the subject of entrusting the guardianship of the realm to the Prince of Wales as Regent for his father would be discussed. Meanwhile, in attendance on the Royal patient were medicos and to spare; a battalion, we are told.

They all fell out.

Each saw in his unfortunate Majesty the symptoms he desired to see, with the inevitable result, that everyone saw differently. Sir Gilbert Baker and Dr Addington (father of the subsequent Prime Minister and in the full confidence of the Queen) were hopeful of recovery. Dr Warren, a pronounced Whig, on the other hand, held entirely to the contrary, and the many others, including Willis, who did all the work and accomplished the real cure, were divided into two bitterly antagonistic camps, misleading everyone with absolutely contradictory reports.

Now this Regency could be worked on two distinct plans. The Prince could become King in all but name, or, on the other hand, be a sort of wooden figure-head, admitted on sufferance, because it was impossible to exclude him altogether, unable to stir without consulting a council; and this last was the plan of Mr Pitt.

He heard the news on the evening of the 6th that the king was dying—in other words, his own overthrow was to be hourly expected; and when this was found not to be so, but that the King would live, he determined on a stiff fight for the interests of himself and the side he represented—sure of the Queen, whom scandal said favoured him unduly. Besides, it was to her interest that the King should recover, and, failing that, he resolved that as little power as possible should go to the Prince.

The Prince had quarrelled with the Duke of Portland some time before, and another influential Whig, Lord Loughborough, the Chief Justice, would throw in his lot with

the Prince's party and risk the recovery of the King, but he had his price, the Chancellorship, and the then Chancellor, Lord Thurlow, who seemed hesitating, could only be tempted to the unrestricted Regency side on a promise that he should retain that position. In the restricted Regency the Queen would obtain possession of the King's person, in the unrestricted the Prince would have that charge, and with it went the disposition of the Royal household and the patronage of four hundred places, including the offices of Lord Steward, Lord Chamberlain, and Master of the Horse. So the extreme Whigs were mighty anxious for the Prince to have complete power.

The King's case was by no means hopeless, and Pitt, hoping he would get better, suggested a fifteen days' adjournment. This came as a boon to the Opposition, it gave them further breathing time and a period to wait, in which it might be reasonably hoped their leader would arrive.

Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who was waiting to see which ship was going to swim, was holding out either way just as long as ever he could, flirting airily with both sides and as yet not committing himself. He had been instrumental to an extraordinary degree in the rejection of Fox's Indian Bill. He had supported Warren Hastings, yet he was at daggers drawn with Pitt.

He wanted to see the Prince, and the Prince wanted to sound him, but such was his extraordinary care of himself and anxiety not to involve his political character, that the greatest secrecy was to be observed, and the only place the shy bird would consent to for a meeting must be away from either London or Windsor. This was difficult. The Prince was then chained to Windsor. However, it was finally arranged for the meeting to take place at Bagshot, the Duke of Gloucester's, the cautious one being able to drive over, without fear of detection, from his villa at Dulwich.

Maria and Mr Sheridan drove down together, for it was an awkward time with that reckless, improvident person; just then he and his wife, temporarily without a home, were staying with her.

Lords Rawdon, Barrymore, Loughborough, Sir Gilbert Elliot and Mr Burke came singly, then the Prince and the Duke of York, and the indispensable Captain Payne, and, after they had waited some time, the savage-looking yet clever, beetle-browed Chancellor at last arrived. He was as cautious as a Scotsman and said little, whilst all these people were arguing together for their own advancement, not the Prince's.

"Upon the supposition of a state of disorder without prospect of recovery, or of a speedy extinction," Loughborough started smoothly.

"You are, perhaps, premature, my Lord," said the Chancellor, drily.

"I can hardly be premature with the word 'supposition.' The administration of government devolves to the Prince of right."

"He is bound by every duty to assume it, and his character would be lessened in public estimation if he took it on any other ground but right, or on any sort of compromise," said Payne, giving voice to a sincerely-cherished sentiment.

"The mode of proceeding that occurs to my mind is, that his Royal Highness should summon a Privy Council, declare his intention of taking upon himself the care of the State and direct several Ministers to attend him, with the public business of their offices," said Sheridan, darting a look at Thurlow.

"It is of vast importance that I should appear to act entirely for myself, not to consult, but to order and direct," suggested the Prince.

"Of course, but you ought to communicate with the assembly of the council before it takes place," began Loughborough, thinking of himself, "and make one or two additions to the Cabinet, such as you might think proper to show your authority, your Royal Highness."

"I am convinced of the impossibility of the Ministry managing the present Parliament in any way hostile to the Prince," declared Payne, optimistically.

"Oh," said the Lord Chancellor.

"And what are your opinions, Madam?" asked Lord

Rawdon, politely, so as to include the silent Maria in the discussion.

"The firm high hand, the Divine right theory sounds very well," she said, "but, after all, we are a very small party here. The great Whig influences are still loyal to the Sovereign, bound by a sort of illogical fealty. The Duke of Devonshire and the Duke of Portland say, they are men of huge influence—true, they are not for the King, but that does not prove they will side with us!"

"Bah!" said the Priuce, "you talk like a woman. Nothing venture, nothing win."

"Ecod! You don't want your reign inaugurated with a civil war!"

"Declare yourself boldly!" cried Barrymore.

The Prince hesitated.

"Yes, why not?" said Payne, equally excited.

"You speak only in your own interest, Jack!" returned George, with uncomplimentary candour. "I have no proper adviser. They are all nervous, cringing women, or self-interested place-seekers!"

As if in answer to this charge the door was flung open, and, standing in the doorway, with yellow, sickly face, emaciated body and blood-shot, swollen eyes, was Fox.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIGHT FOR THE REGENCY

"Foes untrampled, wavering friends."

He cast one astounded glance at Thurlow and then allowed himself to be enthusiastically welcomed and cross-questioned.

Sickened with politics and the hopeless position of his party, he had sailed for Italy in August with Mrs Armistead, the lady who soon afterwards became Mrs Fox, intent on a long, lazy holiday. He determined to read no letters or newspapers; indeed, during the whole time he was away he looked at but one of the latter, and that was to see what horse had won a certain race. It was three months since they had received a single letter. One day, at Bologna, he heard accidentally that someone had been inquiring for him at Geneva. Almost at the same time he heard also that his nephew, Lord Holland, of whom he was very fond, was ill, and he jumped to the conclusion the news concerned that individual's death. The messenger who found him had, however, been dispatched by the all-humble Prince on the 6th. Contrary gales detained him at Dover until the 8th; then, once across the Channel, he went on to Paris and at breathless speed South. Although fogged at Geneva, he was only nine days in tracking the great man, and Fox, with his own good-nature, forgetful of all enmities, was only nine days also in returning, travelling almost day and night.

At Lyons he heard of the King's recovery and loss of reason, and, abandoning his own travelling chariot, or, rather, leaving it with Mrs Armistead to proceed more leisurely,

he hired a common post-chaise and pushed on with still greater urgency.

He drove up to Thomas's Hotel in Berkeley Square, London, early on Monday morning the 24th.

In half a dozen shrewd questions he found out much. He went to Carlton House and learnt further that his patron, the Prince, was at Windsor. Nothing daunted, he repaired to Park Lane, hopeful of more "inside" information, and there saw Mrs Sheridan, whose delight at the sight of him was unfeigned and fervent, and who immediately dispatched him to Bagshot.

Of course, he took command at once, and his delay, had it been another two days would have been almost fatal to the cause, matters being already involved in a painful quagmire.

But, unfortunately, never was a man more unfit in health for an arduous campaign than he. His first acts, however, were admirable. To start with, he made peace and even established cordiality between George and his own *fidus Achates*, the Duke of Portland, so great was the change Fox effected between them that they met quite openly at Burlington House. The next thing he advised was to dismiss Thurlow altogether from their calculations. No words of mine can describe his distrust of this slippery, elusive person. "He will betray us if he betrays them," he said. "You will lose the confidence of all the best Whigs if you take him into your confidence. I wouldn't trust him! Faugh! Why not let Loughborough have the Chancellorship? He is, in comparison, an honest man." Fox considered, too, that the Chief Justice was being treated most unfairly, for he speedily found out the Prince had caused Captain Payne to write in his name as far back as five days after the seizure of the King, as follows: "Tell Lord Loughborough I am persuaded no less of his attachment than I desire him to be of mine, and I shall always receive his advice with the same degree of pleasure as I do upon this occasion, and *without which I shall not act for any material decision.*" In honour the Party was completely committed to him.

But he was shelved. One of those extraordinary infatua-

tions for people of both sexes, that all his life was so completely his characteristic, now assailed George for this very unfascinating person. He was deaf to common sense, and the offer was made him in plain English to throw up the Ministry and cast in his lot with the Prince. The offer was made by George's creature, Warren, and with it went many splendid promises.

Thurlow did not capitulate. Oh, dear, no. There was nothing of the ripe cherry about him; he was studiously indifferent to the Prince's courting. The Prince, in order to see his new darling the oftener, had arranged that he should inspect the King daily, ostensibly to pronounce if there was a possibility of his recovery. But from the Chancellor's point of view, this was the actuality, and as long as there was a possibility of the King getting better, and, as he judged it, there was a great one, he was not going to commit himself.

On the 26th Mr Pitt heard for certain that Thurlow was now as firm as a rock. He also heard the less palatable item that his Majesty had been babbling State secrets, and later, at midnight, still worse, that Mr Fox was then with Lord Thurlow. He learnt it of the individual who came with the summonses for a Cabinet meeting at Windsor the next afternoon.

The Prince that day had sent a letter to the Cabinet, written in his own hand, stating that, "not choosing to act upon his own authority," he wished the advice of his Ministers before moving the King to Kew, which was desirable as being nearer town and more private.

The birds were too wary to be thus caught. They were ready to see the King, "as it was the pleasure of the Prince *and* the Royal Family," they said. The word "authority" had frightened them. The Prince was invisible, but they saw the King and the Duke of York, to whom the Prime Minister was mighty nasty, but in time he was to have his equanimity roughly jarred, for just as the Chancellor was making excuses not to return to town with the others, alleging he was dining with a friend in Windsor, a servant came, bringing Thurlow's hat, which had been mislaid and for which there was being a great search made, saying that

it had been discovered in the Prince's room. Pitt took the trouble afterwards to make inquiries about the gentleman's subsequent movements that day, and elicited that the mysterious friend was the Prince of Wales.

Still hopeful of dispensing with the Lord Chancellor, as a final resource Mr Fox attempted to gain the support of Mrs Fitzherbert to his views, but she would have nothing to say to him. He tried the mediation of a third person, Mrs Sheridan; she proved quite useless, and her husband was equally so; then he sent the adroit Philip Francis to try and establish more cordial relations, and his mission also was a dismal failure; finally, he had recourse to the Duchess of Devonshire, who immediately gave a small private supper, to which came the Prince and Duke of York from Kew, but half an hour's drive off, who brought with them the half-inebriated Jack Payne. Sheridan was not asked, as Fox did not want him. Mrs Fitzherbert was the only lady besides the Duchess and Lady Elizabeth Forster, and the three wore Regency caps.

The Duke of Devonshire was a quiet, indolent, nonchalant man of exquisite manners. He was an unenthusiastic Whig.

Of course, nothing but "Regency" was talked, and talked too much by the Captain, whose silly, fuddled head, was just at its silliest and most fuddled point. He had brought with him a window picture of the Prince as a baby, with "Regent" written round his sash, and "Billy" behind, as the nurse, holding him with leading-strings.

"And that is what it would be!" he declared in a loud voice, effectively spoiling other people's conversation. "And worse, if William, the would-be Conqueror, conquers. Why is he so anxious about his damned restrictions? Why, I say? Because the Prince will refuse altogether, that's why. Any man of spirit would, and the Prince is a man of spirit, bless him, like me. Then he will form a committee of Regency, of which he will be the nominal head. Why nominal?—because the committee will be paid to walk about; he'll rule everything. It will be God save King William IV. then."

Somebody tried to shut him up. Fox, it was easy to see,

was extremely angry, the two Princes looked foolish, the Duke disgusted, and his feelings appeared to be shared by the ladies.

"I must speak!" he continued pathetically, nearly crying at his own goodness. "I am such a loyal, true soul to those I serve, and even to those, however unparental their conduct to those near to them. It truly rejoices me that Mr Pitt's chastity will protect the Queen."

The Prince clenched his fists, the Duke of York half started to his feet, everyone else was horrified, too much so indeed, to speak or stir for a moment.

"You little, insignificant, good-for-nothing upstart! pert, chattering puppy!" said the Duchess, "how dare you speak of your Royal Masters' Royal Mother in that style?"

Then, with a swish of silk, the three ladies swept from the room.

"Leave them to settle him, my dear," said her Grace, slipping her hand through Maria's arm as they entered the big, cool room. Lady Elizabeth had disappeared. Shortly afterwards, with an excuse, the Duchess went in search of her.

Maria was sitting with her back to the door. Someone came in, to her disgust it was Fox. Looking round for a mode of escape, she noticed he was ghastly. "Are you ill, Sir?" she asked coldly.

"Do not distress yourself," he answered, with his rare smile. "I have been overdoing it, perhaps, a little, since my return, but nothing worth mentioning. And I should have followed you, anyhow. I have something to say to you."

"I fail entirely to guess what," she returned.

"Madam," he began earnestly, "we are friends in at least one thing, involuntary friends, if you will, our interest is the same in one object—the person whom we both serve. An excitable, perverse, headstrong, lovable person."

"Sir, I wish to have nothing in any way to do with you."

"I know you must blame me—*must!*" he repeated emphatically. "But let us combine in this. He is very fond of me, but you, as is only natural, have far more influence than I."

"Indeed, only natural!" she returned scornfully.

"Dear lady, for his sake unite with me in this one thing."

"Oh! I thought Mr Fox would not come supplicating unless there was something to be gained."

"It's Thurlow" he said, coming direct to the point. "He is a double-faced man. No good to anybody. We shall win without him. He will but betray us—all our private affairs—to Pitt; he will attach himself to the winning Party. We are certain to come into power—"

"Yes, and Mr Fox as Prime Minister, of course."

"Madam, I want you to persuade him to see it is no good coquetting with the other side; it is to their greater interest to curtail his freedom, and with us, our interest—my interest—is utterly with him."

"Yes."

"This restricted business is absurd, his Highness has right—"

"Mr Fox turned Tory!"

"Well, you must own it is absurd to prevent his bestowing a peerage on his own brother—and you."

"And you?" she returned. "Thank you, Sir, I have no wish to be a second Duchess of Kendal."

"You won't help me, then, against Thurlow, to defeat his double dealing?"

"Sir, how can you have the audacity to be so brazen-faced as to ask my assistance after rolling me in the kennel? Let me tell you this: I would sooner see the committee of Regency with Pitt at the head, as Captain Payne spoke of just now in his drunken folly, than that any act of mine should assist, however indirectly, to deliver this unfortunate country into your greedy, dishonourable hands."

"George," she said, some hours later. "I am less against Thurlow than I was."

"*So? Warum?*"

"Because one dishonest man fears him so much that it has almost persuaded me of his integrity."

On the 10th the Prime Minister suggested in the House that a committee should be appointed to examine precedents, before deciding on their course of action.

"Precedents!" exclaimed Fox, indignantly, pale with illness and darker and more saturnine, thinner, and bearing a greater likeness to his ancestor—Charles II.—than usual. "There exist no precedents whatever that bear on the present case. Never before was there, under such circumstances, a person in this country, an heir-apparent, of full age and capacity to exercise the power of Sovereignty. His Royal Highness has as clear, as express a right as in the event of his Majesty's having undergone a natural demise."

"I'll unwhig the gentleman for the rest of his life!" said Pitt, with joy, to the man sitting next him when the fatal slip was uttered. Up he was like Jack-in-the-box in an instant. "The doctrine we have just heard is little short of treasonable to the Constitution," he said. "The Prince has no more right than I have. He has a *claim*, that, of course, is entitled to the greatest respect, but when the Sovereign is, either by infancy, disease or absence, incapable of exercising the regal functions, it belongs to the estates of the realm to determine who shall be the vice-Regent and with what portion of the executive authority such vice-Regent shall be entrusted. The great privileges, our own rights, have been questioned, and I pledge my honour that all I have stated can be proved to be supported by precedent."

Mr Fox.—"The Prince's right could not be more clear if the King was dead. I defy you, acute as you are, to prove your precedent."

Mr Sheridan.—"I consider it my duty to point out the grave danger that may result from his Royal Highness being forced to assert his right."

Mr Pitt.—"After so indecent a menace, I must see to maintaining the rights of the House, which will do its duty in spite of any threat, however high the quarter from which it may come. Until the committee have fully investigated the matter, I propose that the Lord Chancellor shall be empowered to affix the Great Seal."

Mr Burke.—"How dare you, Sir, thus burst into flame and attempt to intimidate us? Where is our boasted freedom of debate, if we are to be charged with treason by the Prince's competitor? The proposal cannot be considered a moment by any who consider themselves gentle-

men. The Great Seal, it appears, is to be affixed by a commission robbing the executive power of its due function, a composition of wax and copper to represent the Sovereign. I renounce all obedience to a King so formed. I worship the gods of our glorious Constitution, I will not bow down before wax and copper. I approve not of the crimes of robbery or house-breaking, yet they are more excusable than the misdemeanour of forgery. If the unfortunate monarch, whom we all lament, could but know of this proposition, how agonisedly he would cry 'Let not a black-browed phantom usurp my throne!' The Prime Minister is so fond of power, that he has determined to cripple its exercise for his successors, to prevent just reward being meted to their honest, deserving supporters. But despite that, we will triumph yet, despite his machinations. (Order, Order!) Lord FitzWilliam will be Marquis of Rockingham."

THE SPEAKER.—"Order, order. The honourable Member is out of order."

MR PITT.—"The honourable Member has announced himself and his friends as successors of the present administration. I don't know on what authority he makes this declaration, but I am sure the House and country are much obliged to him for the seasonable warning of what they have to expect. The nation has already had experience and to spare, of the methods of the right honourable gentleman's leader," etc.

Neither side shone. The meaner Whigs harried their leaders in their anxiety for place, so that they tripped woefully, and Pitt took scarcely any trouble to conceal his anxiety to humiliate the Prince and curtail his power. He had his way, too, in nearly everything. The resolutions that were passed one by one, though the Whigs fought hard, were just what he wanted.

The guardianship of the realm was to be entrusted to the Prince of Wales, but he could grant no peerages save to the Royal Family, or any reversionary grants, or any patent places. He could not give away the King's real or personal property (a most insulting clause this), and finally it was decided that the King's person should be entrusted to the

care of the Queen, who was to be assisted by a council, and the officers of the household were to be under her direction.

The Prince, of course, objected, but that was of no avail. He sent an eloquent letter, written by Sheridan, Sir Gilbert Elliot or Lord Loughborough, to that effect.

While the restrictions were being passed by the Lower House, up sprang the indomitable Mr Rolle, bringing forward his favourite subject, and suggesting a clause depriving the Prince of the Regency should he choose to marry a Papist, and to exclude anyone thus married, either in law or in fact, from the government.

Mr Grey defended, which was strange, as he knew the truth, but just then he was hand in glove with the Prince at Carlton House. Poor Fox was seriously ill at Mrs Armistead's in South Street, so bad, indeed, as to be unable to leave the house, and the Prince had to go to him there. He was disgusted at the influence of Sheridan, Grey and Payne, as was his friend, the Duke of Portland.

Useless snarlings over the Bill were still wasting the time of the Lords, when a report got about that the King was better. This was rapidly confirmed by additional rumours, and, under the circumstances, the Duke of Portland declined to take office.

It was found to be really true. The Prince and the Duke of York would not believe it. Not that, apart from a little feeling of ruefulness in the fall of the Prince's fortune, they were not sincerely and honestly pleased, for they were wholesome-minded young men, if they did not understand their father or he them, but they thought it was a shabby device of the Queen and "Billy," and their open expression of their disbelief made them intensely unpopular. As for the Queen, her behaviour in her anxiety for herself, was throughout by far the most disgraceful of anyone's. The cry of "place" could with justice be raised against her, far louder, in comparison, than against anybody else. And now, in the ears of her unfortunate husband—whose poor, weak brain was all dazed and confused, as it was with difficulty drawn from the cloud of insanity—she poured a continual stream of poison concerning the unfilial behaviour of his eldest son during his illness. This sweet woman did more harm with

her tongue during those first days of restoration to reason than all the coming years were able to counteract—and the Princes were prevented access to their father.

Amongst the ratters and recalcitrants some were skilful enough to save their necks, some were not. The Lord Chancellor was, however, one of the former; he was a firmer, stauncher, more loyal Tory than ever. He deserves, therefore, the respect due to success.

A gleam came to lighten the darkness and soothe poor George's vanity. A deputation arrived from Whig Ireland inviting him to take up the Regency of that country. They arrived when the King was almost well, but they were heartily welcomed and fêted, nevertheless.

I have no space to tell of all that happened afterwards, when his Majesty, who ought in common humanity to have been allowed a long, peaceful convalescence, was hurried back by the Queen and the Prime Minister long before he was fit for the routine and duties of ordinary life. Of how he went to give thanks for his recovery publicly at St Paul's Cathedral, and of all the fêtes and quarrels, rejoicings and acrimonies in connection with his restoration, and the triumphant Pitt and disappointed Whigs, and all the nasty womanly slights the Princes were subjected to. Let it be said all these were the work of the Queen.

But I must mention one thing. When the King was well enough to return to Windsor, the whole of London spontaneously illuminated, and that night, as the Prince was driving to the opera with his brother, the coach got stopped in a narrow street, and the mob, recognising them, surged round shouting, "God save the King!" and the Prince joined as heartily as any. Then someone said, "Pitt for ever! Long live Pitt!"

"Fox for ever! God bless Fox!" shouted he in answer.

Then some drunken person began to insist on his saying "Pitt for ever!" and pulled open the coach door.

"Damn Pitt! Charlie for ever! God bless my friend Fox!" shouted George, and would have jumped out and settled the matter then and there, if the Duke of York, calling to the coachman to drive on, had not held him back

forcibly. And the man did drive on at a great pace, the coach door flapping about as they went.

Later, he went on foot to Pall Mall to see the illuminations, where he encountered a gang of butchers with marrow bones and cleavers, and; preceded by this dignified escort, he made his way to Brookes' in St James's Street, where he gave them ten guineas for drink. "After this," we are told, "he was persuaded to go home."

Thus burst one of the biggest bubbles of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HORSE "ESCAPE"

"Ours is but one heart, one honour and one death."

THIS bitter struggle, and all the evil feelings it had aroused, had sown the seed of a sequel unparalleled, unique and outrageous.

But we must tell the story properly from the first. The Duke of Richmond was one of the shilly-shallyers who had deserted his Party during the Regency debates, only now to find himself in a quandary, for neither side would trust him. He had a young kinsman—his nephew, in fact—whom, we must charitably assume, was very angry at this and anxious in every way to give publicity to his own unbroken loyalty to the Conservative cause, but even considering it in this lenient light, his conduct was little short of inexcusable. The general belief was that he was deliberately "set on" by the Court Party. His name was Charles Lenox, he was Lieutenant-Colonel of the Coldstream Guards; he was placed in this regiment over all the other officers' heads without a single word of explanation to the Duke of York, the Colonel. Of course, there was much said about it, and the Duke was naturally very indignant at the humiliation of the slight, and, without avail, opposed it. When he found this useless, he took the trouble to tell Lenox that, though he highly disapproved of the way he had come into the regiment as quite against the correct manner, and most annoying to himself as the Colonel, it indeed being an impossibility for him not to advertise his opposition, yet "personally he was very glad indeed to welcome Mr Lenox, considering his company a most pleasant addition."

Said Lenox, "It's the King's pleasure I should be here, and that's enough for me."

But even after that for a time they were very intimate, Lenox being nearly always at Oatlands Park. We can learn of no particular quarrel between them, but in the early spring of '89, from the time the King began to get better, Lenox seized every opportunity to abuse and insult the Prince and Duke in "the most scurrilous and blackguardly" way. Mostly it was about their anxiety to shelve the King and Queen and get everything. Encouraged by being unrebuked, the gentleman proceeded further. One day, at D'Aubigne's Club, he was discoursing on his favourite topic, when the Duke came in. He neither took the trouble to change the subject or even to modify his tones.

One of those present, Colonel St Ledger,* then said, "Funny thing you always manage to say these things to and about those whose hands are tied. Why the devil don't you say it to one of *us* who can give you a suitable answer to your confounded insolence!"

In return Lenox—and this shows the man—got up without a word and left the room, slunk away, one might call it.

"'Fore Gad! it's damnable," agreed another. "He certainly must be taught his place by some one, i' faith."

"He is a cad," declared the Duke, heartily; "like a fish out of water with us. Look at the way he went off, then, after your defending us, my brother and me. No gentleman would have submitted to be publicly rebuked."

"He is an arrant coward," said St Ledger.

The Duke told his brother nothing of the business, for he thought he had worries and to spare already, but he was to discover it in a most objectionable way.

A masked ball was given in honour of the King's recovery. The two Princes had gone to it separately, and their different engagements had so intervened that they had scarcely met for two or three days, although the Duke was at the time the guest of his elder brother at Carlton House. Meeting by chance in the crush and simultaneously recog-

* Pronounced Syllinger.

nising each other, despite their disguises, they, as though by common consent, stepped on to a balcony to which an open window near gave access and where it was cool and retired.

Having finally fixed the date of a visit they proposed to pay to Newmarket together, they still lingered, loath to quit the refreshing spring night for the heat, glare and turmoil within, keeping up, meanwhile, a desultory conversation.

I must, however, before proceeding further, try and picture to you how high and how violent Party feeling ran. Young ladies jilted eligible lovers for no other reason than their professing different political opinions to their own, the young blades fought each other vigorously and frequently, and amongst the older, staider folk life-long friendships were dissolved through wordy arguments on the merits of King *versus* Prince.

As the Whigs boasted a female leader, a chief whose word was of value, whose will was felt, whose salon was a power, so did the Tories, and the Duchess of Devonshire had a powerful, ambitious rival for supremacy and victory for her own Party in the Duchess of Gordon, and this second lady was strenuously supported by her husband the Duke, who had nought of the indifference in his composition that characterised his Grace of Devonshire.

But these ardent supporters of Mr Pitt, presumably carried away by their devotion, proceeded at times beyond parliamentary limits, as witness the present instance.

The Duke of York had withdrawn his mask and was fanning himself idly with it when the sudden sound of near footsteps caused him to clap it quickly on again.

"Confound it!" said George, in German, preparing to rise. "As there is someone coming, let us go, Brother."

But before they could do so, three muffled, masked figures appeared, and from a much smaller, slighter build one seemed a woman.

"I am going home," he continued in the same language. "I have had enough of this. I've done my duty in looking in. Come with me, Frederic. We can unmask as we walk through the rooms. Put your star on, *Bruder mein.*"

But the three strange figures spread themselves out silently, barring their way.

"God save the King!" shouted the foremost one, in a feigned, unnatural voice.

"God save the King," returned the Prince, amused, and, falling in with their humour, he likewise attempted to disguise his tones.

"Blast and confound his enemies!"

"Blast and confound his enemies."

"False Ministers and traitorous sons."

The Princes stared.

"Eternal damnation to him who has violated his allegiance and would have betrayed his country into the hands of a rebellious, mutinous usurper," continued the unknown, in a sing-song voice.

"Sir, do you know whom you address?" began the Duke, indignantly.

"A corrupt, depraved profligate, a wantoner in the lap of the Papist harlot, who would scarce have waited his unfortunate father's demise to desecrate, pollute and defile our glorious, hard-won freedom with cowardly intrigues, under the cloak of Protestantism, to sell us again into the lascivious slavery of Popish dominance."

"You are either mad or possessed," said the Duke. "But I will sober you. Learn, then, you insolent, blackguardly hound, whom you so dastardly address," and, so saying, he pulled off his brother's mask.

"Craven poltroon yourself!" shouted the other, for one instant forgetful of his disguised voice. "Any mean-spirited coward can use fine words when he dare not face fine steel. And as for you"—to the Prince—"you have earned the just loathing of an honest man and a Protestant."

"Kindly address yourself to me, Sir," said the Duke. "I recognise you now. I believe you are an officer in my regiment, Let me tell you, you are a coward and a disgrace to your profession. But if you are unknown to me, and I am under a misapprehension, if you will kindly unmask to prove it, why, I will at once apologise to you for having mistaken you for the son of a gentleman."

"'Ware," said the small, slight intruder. And as though by magic they disappeared. Then the sanctuary was half-invaded by several gay couples, who, however, on recognising the Prince, withdrew and passed on with light laughter.

The Prince picked up his mask slowly and put it on. "It was an organised plot to draw us into a quarrel," he said deliberately, "and had it succeeded— Who was it you suspect?"

The Duke looked around. "Not here," he said significantly.

"No, you are right."

"And another thing, this is not the end." He ground his teeth with impotent rage.

But they were never able to prove who the three were, that is, prove enough to be in a position to bring it home to them, though they knew them in reality well enough as the Duke of Gordon, his daughter Lady Charlotte, and the spokesman was Lenox, her betrothed.

Two days afterwards on parade, Lenox said, "May I inquire, Sir, if, and if so, when, where and why you stated that I submitted to language that no gentleman ought to have borne?"

"I did say so," said the Duke, "twice. It was at D'Aubigne's, in the first place, and the second time you well know where, considering I said it to you, and I can repeat it with truth whenever you wish to hear it, but this is neither a fit time nor a fit place to discuss the matter."

Later, in the orderly-room, he said, "Your Royal Highness will oblige me by informing me what these words were that I ought to have resented and who spoke them."

"Considering the words were spoken to you, you know them as well as I do, and I certainly shall not tell you the name of the gentleman and so point out a quarrel to you."

"You place me under a great hardship, Sir. I am not conscious of anything that has been said there was the remotest reason I should resent, and you make it impossible

for me to obtain satisfaction. And you can so easily refuse, Sir, my hands are tied against you. I must consider your safety as my Colonel and the son of my King."

"I most sincerely trust you will not allow these considerations to weigh with you, Sir, in the least!" cried the Duke, in a white heat, "and that you will oblige me by regarding me in this as an ordinary gentleman!"

"Impossible, your Royal Highness. I know my place too well." With a humble, subservient bow, he turned away.

His next move was amidst universal ridicule to dispatch a circular letter to all the members of D'Aubigne's Club, asking them to let him know if they could call to mind any expression that had been used to him which could in any way bear the construction put upon it by his Royal Highness, and entreating the favour of being informed, if they could, within the week.

Scant comfort he received from this. Some answers were taunting, some insulting. Colonel St Ledger wrote that he kept no account of club conversation, but that if he had said anything at any time Colonel Lenox wished satisfaction for, he was ready at all times to give it him.

Then Lenox sent a written message to the Duke that he himself could not recollect that any words a gentleman ought not to submit to had been used to him, nor could any of the members of D'Aubigne's assist his memory, and he should expect as his right that it should publicly be denied by his Royal Highness.

Receiving no answer, he then sent a challenge to the Duke *via* Lord Winchelsea. The Duke did everything in his power to keep the matter a secret from his brother, and only consulted one person, Lord Rawdon, who accepted the offer to be his second. They met on Wimbledon Common early on the morning of May the 26th. So inflamed with rage was Lenox, so determined his intention to kill the young Prince, that Lord Winchelsea's carriage, with post horses, trunks and imperials, was waiting for him to make his escape by.

At the signal being given, the opponents being at twelve paces from each other only, Lenox fired, grazing a curl on the Duke's forehead. Lenox, lowering his weapon, remarked on this. Rawdon said it was not the Duke's intention to fire, he had no animosity, he had simply come out to give Colonel Lenox satisfaction, if he was not satisfied he could fire again.

Lord Winchelsea said it was impossible for Lenox to fire if the Duke would not, and he hoped he had no objection to say he considered Lieutenant-Colonel Lenox a man of honour and courage.

The Duke said he would say nothing. They separated, and the two parties severally left the ground.

Meanwhile, the news had leaked out at Carlton House, and the Prince, unable to find where the meeting was to be, paced about like a madman. After a long, weary wait for him, the Duke came strolling leisurely across the yard as though nothing in the world had happened.

"Brother, it is all over and all is quite well. I have no time to tell you particulars," he concluded indifferently, "I have an appointment at the tennis court."

But the Prince would hear none of that, and made the Duke repeat the whole story through three or four times. Then he, accompanied by the Duke of Clarence (Prince William), and attended by Colonel Goldsworthy, set off at once for Kew, lest the King and Queen might be frightened and get the first news in a wild and incorrect rumour. He sent a message to his father that he wished to see him alone for five minutes. The Colonel took the message. When he was admitted into the King's presence, the Queen and Princesses were with him. However, at his earnest entreaty, these last retired, and he told the story. In doing so, accidentally he let out that a week before, he had warned the Queen that there might be trouble brewing.

"I have heard nothing of it," commented the King.

The Queen was silent.

Prince William had not been admitted.

As the Prince said, for an officer to challenge his Colonel was most unusual, and opposed entirely to all

just ideas of subordination in the army, and how much more so when that officer was a private person and the Colonel a Prince of the Blood Royal, and heir-presumptive. During the time he was talking to the King the Queen stood looking out of the window indifferently.

"It was more Frederic's fault than Lenox's," said she, presently. "He was the most anxious to fight of the two."

"You are very much misinformed, Madam," protested her eldest son, hotly. "If a man is so very anxious to fight, he hardly refrains from firing; it can be no pleasure to go out to be fired at without retaliation."

"It does not intres' me," said the Queen, in English, and walked away and out of the room.

And the next day when the Duke of York went down to see his father, it was significant that his Majesty tiptoed across the room, and pulled the door to of the adjoining one very softly, where the Queen was, before he took his son in his arms, and presently, when she came in, all she said was,—

"Did you find Boodles' ball full last night?"

It seems almost impossible to credit it, but Lord Winchelsea, Lenox's second, who was a Lord of the Bedchamber, neither resigned that situation, nor was requested to do so, nor even, as far as is known, received a reprimand.

At the French Ambassador's ball, on the King's birthday, the Queen made herself highly conspicuous by ostentatiously kissing her fan the entire length of the room to Lenox, and he after this absolutely had the audacity to dance in the very same set as the young Princes. It was a country dance. The Prince of Wales was furious, and as he danced down with his partner, the Princess Royal, turning each couple, he met Lenox and his partner, Lady Catherine Barnard, and without a word seized his sister by the hand and led her from the floor. The Duke of York danced on, but the Duke of Clarence followed his eldest brother's example.

"Are you tired?" asked the Queen.

"Not at all."

"I suppose it too 'ot?"

"In such company, Madam, it is impossible not to find it too hot."

"I see. You want me and the *prinsessinen* to retire, eh?"

"I think that is the very best thing possible, Madam."

And with an ill grace she did so.

And now there is a break of nearly two years before anything of interest happened to the Prince and Mrs Fitzherbert. They lived at Brighton a great deal and at Knapshott in Hampshire, where he often hunted with Mr Villebois's hounds. The three feathers are still to be seen on the club button.

In March 1791, he made it up with the Queen. Says Mr Walpole, "a gentleman who lives at the east end of St James's Park has been seen by a lady who has a large house at the West-end, and they have kissed and are friends, which he notified by toasting her health at a club the other day." The Prince continued to be pressed more and more by his steadily growing debts. Still, he could not find it in his heart to abolish his greatest extravagance, the re-established racing stable. In 1788 he won the Derby, and, after that, the Turf passion seemed to take complete possession of him. It is a noble hobby, honest, free, manly, worthy of the son of a king—but, like all other things, there are use and abuse. The climax came in the October of this year.

The Prince, who was in an even greater state of impecuniosity than usual, had come down to Park Lane full of his trouble.

"Molly," said he, "I want £2000 until the day after to-morrow."

"My dearest, do you want me to get it, to borrow it? What for?"

"To get down to Newmarket with."

"Oh," she cried, "I don't want you to go there so soon again, George. You know you promised me."

"Sorry, *Mariechen*, impossible to put it off this time. Next time I promise to please you."

"Dearest, yesterday I saw—the Queen."

"Oh!"—wrinkling his forehead.

"She sent for me. It was to ask me to use my influence to try and persuade you not to go down this year. She has had a vivid dream—"

"*Dummes Zeuch!*"

"My dear one, I know something will happen if you go. Stay away this time."

"Fiddle-de-dee! 'Escape' is going to raise our fallen fortunes."

"Can't the horse run without your being there?"

"He could. But he has got to get there. I am going down. Oh, never mind, I'll get the money myself. Only once before you borrowed it, or lent it me, I forget which, and it brought me luck—or, at least, I was foolish enough to think so. Still, as you like."

"Never trouble, Brother," said her other visitor, the Duke of York, a happy bridegroom, but a day returned with his bride, Princess Frederica Ulrica, eldest daughter of the King of Prussia, "I can lend or give you whatever you want."

"No," said Maria, wearily, "he shall have it from me if it will bring luck. Oh, if you would only stay away, though."

"That's my good, sensible girl. Make it three thousand if you can, darling; every halfpenny I have I can treble."

"*Liebes Schwesterlein*," said the Duke of York. "*Du nimst es zu ernsthaft.*"

Then they rode away. The next day the Prince, disregarding all her advice and wishes, went down to Newmarket, accompanied by Mr Fox.

The Dukes of Bedford and Grafton were already in the town for the October meeting, with Lords Clermont and Grosvenor and others who had horses running.

"Escape," on which all the Prince's hopes were now fixed, had been bred by him and sold with the rest of his stable in '87, being purchased by Mr Philip Francis. In '89 the Prince had brought him back again for £1500.

The name came from the horse thrusting his foot one night through the woodwork of the stall when he was only a colt.

The Horse "Escape"

'What an escape!" exclaimed the trainer, Frank Neale, when it was freed without any injury.

This animal was now considered one of the best horses on the Turf, and had scored very successfully, sweeping all before him in the earlier part of the year.

The starters on this occasion were :—

Mr Dawson's "Coriander," . . .	1
Lord Grosvenor's "Skylark," . .	2
Lord Clermont's "Pepator," . .	3
H.R.H. the Prince of Wales's "Escape," .	4

"Escape" was the favourite, and to everyone's astonishment, and the Prince's deep disgust, "Skylark" moued in an easy triumphant first. Sam Chifney, the jockey, accounted for this by saying that "Escape," for want of proper exercise, was not in a fit condition to run.

But the next day, the 21st of October, opinion had veered round like magic, no one would say a good word for the animal, and heavy bets with great odds were made against him. There was another equally unpleasant surprise. "Escape won." Chifney said that the exercise, having opened his pores, caused him to perform better the second day, but almost immediately after the race an ugly rumour got about that grew and grew.

As Chifney came from the scale, he heard that Mr Lake, the gentleman who had the management of the Prince's running horses, had been commenting with unnecessary surprise on "Escape" having won, and saying it was funny the day that he lost the Prince should have been alone with him just before he had to run. The truth was that Lake had lost the first day, when he backed the horse, and lost the second day when he betted against it, and he was so angry that he did not know or care what he said, and so started all these disgraceful insinuations.

The next day the Prince sent for Chifney and said to him, "I am told you won £700 on the race when you were beaten on "Escape" the day before yesterday, and I am told, further, that you won the same sum of money yesterday when the horse won, and I learn also that

Vauxhall Clark put the money on in both cases for you." Vauxhall Clark was clerk of the Prince's stable.

"I cannot think your Royal Highness can have so bad an opinion of me," said Chifney. "Should I offend by asking who has dared to make this statement?"

"What bets had you?" asked the Prince, replying indirectly with another question.

"Twenty pounds on the second day's race, your Royal Highness. I should not have had that, only folks worrited me sore runnin' the 'oss down."

"Is it true that you were arrested on Ascot Heath for £300 and that Clark paid the money for you?"

"I've never 'eard of it afore, your R'yal Highness."

"Will you take an affidavit? Will you swear before a magistrate these things you have told me?"

Chifney said he would.

The Prince then asked him if, for his own satisfaction and honour, and the satisfaction of Chifney himself, as well as to settle the matter finally in the eyes of all betting men, he would further consent to be examined by the stewards of the Jockey Club. Said Chifney, "Your Royal Highness, I am proud to meet any man on the subject."

So the Prince saw Sir Charles Bunbury, "the father of the Turf," one of these same stewards, and asked him to thresh the matter thoroughly out, as he was going to Brighthelmstone that night. And Sir Charles promised that he would.

Accordingly, a form was drawn out by Mr Weatherby, clerk to the Jockey Club, stating everything in its fullest possible detail, which Chifney duly swore before the Rev. Dr Frampton, and afterwards he was interrogated by the stewards—Sir Charles, Mr Dutton and Mr Panton—who most fully cross-questioned him. But the poison had gone home. His fervent protestations were of no avail, and Sir Charles went to Carlton House with the unpleasant intelligence that as long as Chifney rode the Prince's horses no one could start against him.

"You can prove nothing," objected the Prince.

Sir Charles shrugged his shoulders as though disclaiming all responsibility. "People talk so, Sir," he submitted.

"Without foundation, by your own showing."

"There must be some foundation to every scandal, your Royal Highness," objected Lake, who was present.

"Perhaps, then, to your theory of my administering the pail of water," said the Prince, who had since learnt it. "Of all persons I never expected such a thing of you, Walter. I shall pay the forfeits and retire from the Turf, Sir Charles."

"Oh, Sir!" exclaimed that gentleman. "Oh, Sir! Surely you do not contemplate an extreme measure?"

"My dear Bunbury, you can hardly expect me to stay on under supervised surveillance," said the Prince, and then dismissed the matter.

Later in Piccadilly, at Sir John Lade's house, the Prince told Chifney, whom he had appointed to meet him there, that he considered that he was an honest man, and to prove it he was going to allow him two hundred a year as long as he lived. Further, he promised him if ever he kept horses again Chifney should train and manage them.

This is the whole story, and when people say that the two hundred a year was hush-money they are utterly wrong, and neither is the story true, that has steadily gained credence, until it is now accepted without any dispute, that the Prince was expelled from the Jockey Club. He resigned of his own free will. What other course was left to a gentleman when his honour was thus infamously doubted?

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE YEAR '92

"My troop is mustered now!"

A HORRIBLE, black cloud, whose daily increase for ten years had been visible, now hung appallingly all over sunny, discontented France, even spreading over here to the free side of the Channel, every day taking complete possession of men's hearts and filling them with an undefined fear.

England swarmed with the most exclusive aristocratic French, the old *noblesse* distrustful of the wavering King, who, to be left at peace with his hunting and lock-making, would willingly have come to reasonable terms had the democratic interest but had moderate leaders for him to negotiate with. His advisers despised him and would not consent to ceding of one iota to the *canaille.* Had they encouraged him in this, even then he would still have hesitated, for the beautiful Queen was proud and defiant, and, with the imperiousness that brought all their ruin about, would have counselled that the King of France could not treat with his subjects; he must be omnipotent or—nothing. Poor, frivolous, silly woman, she could not realise the strength of the opposing power. Her Versailles banquet, with its Royalist songs and white cockades, gave a distinct impetus to the red Republican waves already about to lash themselves into a dangerous fury. Later, when Mirabeau advised her, as Paris was insubordinate, to throw herself on the protection of all France, which, if discontented, was the greater part of it still loyal, but at any cost to disclaim all appearances of flight, she would have none of him, (oh, the foolishness of it!) but attempted to join the *émigrés* on the German frontier, with the faithful Count

Axel Fersen, but a short time returned from England, acting as coachman, only to be ignominiously dragged back, to all intents and purposes a prisoner.

Mirabeau was now dead and the King's last chance of reigning as a constitutional monarch was gone. A year dragged wearily by, the danger every day growing steadily more menacing. And at last on the 10th of August—the fatal 10th—the great red wave drowned Paris in innocent blood. The Swiss guards were massacred, the Tuileries sacked, all order, all discipline, everything for the moment was succeeded by a raging horrible hell. The King and the Royal Family took refuge with the Assembly. The Assembly was abolished, and they were arrested and placed as prisoners in the Temple. And with the Queen went her faithful friend, the Princesse de Lamballe, but only for one week. She was removed to La Force, and having indignantly refused the oath against the monarchy, on September 3, was delivered to the fury of the maddened populace and her head on a pike held up to the windows of the Queen. "Come out, come and see, *Citoyenne* Capet!" shouted the rabble. "It shall be your turn next!"

Our Prince was at Brighton during the month of August and the awful September massacres after the imitation trial by "killers at six francs a day." Five thousand persons were slaughtered in four days—the noblest, purest blood of France! and I learn that the Prince "received most kindly" the few, too few, refugees that managed to escape.

He was just then, indeed, very busy. Being denied active service by the King, and fired with military ambition, he was very earnestly throwing himself into the formation of a camp at Brighton. On the 3rd of August a detachment of the Tenth Light Dragoons (subsequently the Tenth Hussars), headed by him, encamped on the Belle Vue field, now Regency Square. The Prince had a very grand pavilion-tent pitched for himself near the ruins of Hove Church.

Ten thousand troops, composed of regulars and militia, under the command of General Sir Wiliam Howe, came marching over the South Downs on the Prince's birthday, and were met by him and his brother, the Duke of Clarence, at Preston, and proceeded in twenty different columns to the

camping-ground, which they reached at one o'clock and which stretched in a direct line all along the coast.

The camp lasted over two months and proved of immense amusement to the Prince, who was so crazed for a while with military ardour, that on the 2nd of September he took command of a picket guard and stayed on duty all night.

So bitten did all Sussex get, so infectious was the war fever, that every youth and man, every farm yokel, every gentleman would gladly have followed him to death and glory—with the slightest encouragement, they would have armed to a man.

The first Brighton camp can never be forgotten, if only on one account, the song written round it, "The Brighton Camp, or the Girl I left behind Me." True, the first portion of the title is dropped, but the dismal thing itself clings tenaciously to memory.

And although the Prince was very, very much in earnest, of course, there was relaxation; he had fine times in his wonderful silk tent, where dainty meals and well-cooled wines, imported from the pavilion, were welcome, however incongruous on a supposed battlefield. His own band was there to softly play, and Maria, attired in the becoming uniform adapted to a lady, and which, as it suited her, vastly tickled his vanity—his uniform on his wife. He thus received his brother officers and all his friends, including the latest favourites, Lord and Lady Jersey, the latter, to all appearances, a romantic, sentimental person with an avowed, unrequited affection for the then Lord Byron.

Just when the first edge of his excitement was over, when the soldiering had grown a little tedious though it was still very fascinating, another interest manifested itself by news being brought to him that his own yacht, which he had humanely sent to coast along the French shore, on the very slight chance of being able to pick up somebody, was in sight. It was late in the afternoon, and he had been up since dawn, for that day he had held a great review.

However, when the tidings did come, he rode off at once with Maria and his brother, the Jerseys and others, to the sea front, clattered down the beach and almost into the

sea, which was exceptionally fretful and choppy for that time of the year, and reined up his nervous charger there with an iron wrist; he was always one of the best horsemen in the world. With eager eyes, he scanned the horizon, whilst the others, more cautious, hung back, for the salt spume freely kissed his face—all save the Duke of Clarence. The manœuvres of the past three weeks had rather bored him, now he was in his element. He dismounted and, in the most natural way, came, with the rolling sea gait that never left him, even further out than his brother, and with the aid of a mariner's borrowed telescope gave to the world in a loud voice information for the most part in unintelligble nautical language.

"By the Lord Harry! the wind seems blowing from all points of the compass at once!" He half closed the instrument with an authoritative little click. "She is turning to windward, but if they are in to-night I'll be damned."

"Those little waves to keep her—"

"In the offing, Sister? Yes, but you've no idea what it is out there. Did you see her yaw? I tell you it's impossible, it is such a plaguy, shoaly shore just here at all times, and now with this surf and so squally—" He shrugged his shoulders and opened the telescope again. "They are easing off her jib sheet," he pronounced in a few minutes. "She is going to heave to."

There were now a great number of people clustering on the Steyne and at a respectful distance on the beach. All, save the Prince himself, were dismounted, and the horses, who were much frightened, were led further back.

"They are putting off a boat!" now ran round an excited whisper.

"Ay, sure!"

Launched with neat precision on the third large wave, and each oar well manned, tossed sportively by the giant sea as though it were a nutshell, nearer and nearer the boat drew, the scarlet jerseys of the men showing vividly and cheerily against the muddy sea. Their faces could soon be distinguished, bronzed and bearded, save one,

slight and delicate, that of a mere lad, who worked, however, as manfully as the rest.

On, on. The fisherfolk were forgetful now of their respect of a few minutes before, and, as moved by a common impulse, rushed to where the boat would apparently ground. The Duke of Clarence trudged after them sturdily and the other gentlemen followed suit. The Prince only stayed immovable and turned an imperious head to the scramble fifty feet away. The young officer in charge approached him immediately, and the exhausted crew, almost too overdone to stand, panted answers to the congratulations and questions of the Duke and others.

All save one, the slight boy I have before alluded to. He detached himself unnoticed from the group and staggeringly made his way to where Maria was attempting to calm the timid fears of Lady Jersey.

"Madame! Madame!" he cried, and fell sobbing at her feet. Lady Jersey screamed as she stooped to raise him wonderingly. He shuddered convulsively and then of a sudden was all limp in her arms.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is a woman!" she said.

The pretty, refined features were all stained brown, the fair, matted hair was platted in the conventional pigtail, the delicate hands were all blistered with the rough ropes. It was the young Duchesse of Noailles; she was under twenty-two, and in a sad state when at last she reached friendly English hands. The very sailors did not know who she was. She had entreated of Captain Burton not to tell them the reward on her head was so large, and he was glad enough to comply, for every passenger meant additional risk, and already he had so many. There were thirty-seven nuns, driven out of a convent at Lisle, for the fault only of having aristocratic fathers and relations. These were mostly elderly women, with but thirty pounds between them and starvation. Their jewels, valuables, altar plate, etc., had all been seized when the convent was sacked. Also, he had aboard the Marchioness of Beaule, and her maid, who was conveyed aboard in a box with holes in it, so that she could breathe.

The Duchesse at Dieppe had, not knowing who he was,

offered him a hundred guineas, all she had in the world, to convey her over. Twice had they been stopped and overhauled before they were clear of French waters, and so frightened was the other French lady that she stayed hidden in a coil of rope fourteen hours.

The French authorities were very angry at the innoxious-looking vessel, whose commander was bewilderingly amiable about being searched. They somehow felt that they were being hoodwinked and were powerless. As for the stoical sisters, at them they only laughed. "Let them be," they said. "If the silly English choose to burden themselves with them, more fools they. They were of no good to France."

And now the Duchesse had taken this, her first opportunity to land. She did not mind the danger of the sea, but she could not feel safe until off the yacht on English soil.

Maria's cry caused some movement. The Duke of Clarence came scrunching up the wet shingle towards her, and the sailors went tumbling, eagerly followed by half the crowd, to the westward, into the town.

"I have sent them to splice the main brace," he shouted, with an indicative jerk of his head. "They need it, poor devils, before they attempt to go aboard again. From what I can gather, Burton is going to shift the helm and scud under bare poles to Shoreham harbonr. I'm going back with them"—briefly.

All this time Maria was holding up the Duchesse, who was insensible, knowing nothing of who or what she was, and Lady Jersey, absurdly agitated, beside her, of absolutely no use whatever.

When the Duke was near enough, she told him of her discovery in a low voice. He was much concerned. "Avast there!" he shouted to some of the yachtsmen who were not yet beyond hearing, and as they came reluctantly back, he said, "Poor wench, whoever she is. A natty little craft, I should say, when decked out. Here, my hearties, I want you to carry this lady."

But as they came up the Frenchwoman gave a long, deep sigh and opened her eyes, so he dismissed them again, with a nod.

"So foolish of me!" she exclaimed. "It was the revulsion of feeling. Pardon, Madame, I knew your face! I have seen prints of you! I recognised you instantly as the *bien amante* of the English Prince. Oh, Madame, I am safe at last."

"Yes, yes," said the other, softly, soothingly. "You are safe now."

"Oh, the horror of it!" exclaimed the foreigner. "The dread! The unspeakable fear!"

"But that is all passed now," said Maria. "Try—make up your mind to forget it."

"Yes—it is for me. But my husband—my dear, dear husband—"

After a minute, she pulled herself together and stood up alone. A strange, slight, pathetic figure in her humble sailor dress.

She shaded her eyes with her hand and gazed out to sea. "But the others—they are out there still." She looked towards where the yacht ceaselessly pitched and tossed. "Oh! are they safe?"

"God Almighty! I should think so, under the flag of old England," cried the Duke of Clarence, patriotically. "They'd be safe neaped on French shore with that little rag floating over 'em. Parbuckle me if they are not getting under way!"—excitedly. "I'm off! I hope you'll be better, ma'am, when I see you next." He clattered unceremoniously to the boat in wake of the officer in charge, who had just parted with his brother.

And then George came to them, and having learnt of the identity of the French lady, he greeted her with more ceremony than his brother.

And when the boat was off and its occupants safe on the yacht, they turned and left the seashore. And here I can record a very delightful courtesy on behalf of the inhabitants and visitors of Brighton. For when it was found that the storm-tossed, travel-worn refugees were to be carried still further by eight miles out of their way, everybody who possessed a carriage or trap of any description sent it forthwith to Shoreham to be at the service of the unfortunate ladies. Accommodation

was with difficulty found for them there at the Ship Inn.

Finally, these nuns retired to Brussels, and with them went the two French ladies, who, homeless, penniless, heart-broken, entered the order, but that was not for some little while. A subscription was started for them by the Prince antecedent to their departure, who headed the list with a hundred pounds, a handsome sum being in a short time obtained.

Maria went little to the camp after this, and spent much of her time with the sisters. She sent her own private chaplain to them and did her best to make their stay easy for them, for, of course, none of them knew one word of English.

It was uphill work, for most of them were sullenly silent over their misfortunes. Lady Jersey openly ridiculed her, and the Prince, who never mentioned it himself, detested secretly the very name of her religion. Religion caused dissensions more than enough between married people of different denominations, and although the relations of these parties was unique, it nevertheless acted with its customary dissonance.

CHAPTER XX

THE COUNTESS OF JERSEY

"But will it keep his thoughts true, while I am away?"

Two years have passed. It is again August; a beautiful day, hot and breathless. The summer had been very late in coming, so it was the more welcome now it set in with a sudden, blazing splendour. The sea darted metallic flashes and looked hard and unyielding, the heavy, late green of the trees was full of dust and the flowers drooped pitifully. But the town of Brighthelmstone from end to end was *en fête*, and the people were radiant. Had not their adored Prince come to them to keep his thirty-second birthday? On this happy occasion there was always feasting and merry-making and to spare. Had the people been obliged to choose whether they would sacrifice August 12 or Christmas Day, they would have unanimously pronounced for the latter.

He was a man now; no longer a lad, no longer in the first youth, but at the very acme, the zenith of the attractiveness of a remarkably comely personality had been reached. Alas for romance! it was a substantial personality too. The Prince would never again be willowy and slight, but at that particular moment he was imposing and dignified.

The usual form of this day of jollity was gone through; two oxen were roasted whole, and beer flowed without limit. But first there were races by young country girls for gowns. In a jingling match, a man dressed in bells evaded successfully for half an hour the efforts of a number of persons, blindfolded, to catch him. Cricket went on for the prize of a round of beef; a cheese was grinned for; there were sack races. In the afternoon a sailing match by the fishing

boats for a suit of sails came off. All these sports were under the patronage of the Prince.

For the "nobility" there was a grand open-air breakfast in the Promenade Grove, a place of pleasure, afterwards incorporated into the West Lawn of the Pavilion grounds. The avenue of trees still stands.

The Prince breakfasted there too, that day, to everyone's delight, with various of his particular friends at his table. In the evening there was a very grand ball at the castle and the whole town was illuminated, especially the Promenade Grove, where there was a great transparency of his Royal Highness's coronet and crest, adorned with red roses, with "Long live the Prince!" at the end of the Rutland Walk. At the termination of the cross walk the Garter and Star was ornamented with woodbine and lilies, and on the lawn were to be seen his initials with "Brighton's Support!" in a wreath of acorns and oaks. As half the people had never seen before such specimens of decoration, the admiration elicited was great. In the evening there was a select concert which the Prince attended. His intimates were slightly different now. Relations were again strained with Fox, and poor Sheridan, who had never been quite the same since his beautiful wife died of consumption in '92, was now very seldom with him.

Philip Francis and his daughters were just coming into favour, and Hanger continued the same as well as Sir John and Lady Lade. Amongst others present were Lady Albemarle, Lady C. Grenville, Lord Mornington. A honeymoon couple, Mr and Mrs Bridgeman, Sir Richard and Lady Heron, but not Mrs Fitzherbert. The Prince had come down for his birthday only; he was leaving Brighton the next day. *She* had been there earlier in the season and was to return with him in the latter part of the month.

Meanwhile, he had been passing the time very agreeably, basking in the softly radiant tenderness of unlimited, uncritical praise and flattery, such as he never received from her sensible tongue. He found it delightful. Nobody can tickle a person's vanity with such real dexterity as an experienced Irishwoman, no one can make fulsome com-

pliment sound so real and true, no one can look so honestly sincere when telling a direct lie. This sounds severe, but it is true.

Lady Jersey had now had an intimate acquaintance with the Prince nearly two years. Regarding the case dispassionately, it is hard to say who was the more foolish in an idiotic, sentimental dalliance that had been wasting both their lives for six months past. The Prince was a man who considered himself married; the lady at that time was taking charge of some *grandchildren*.

She said she had a mother's love for him—a remark that could not be called original; she said she was his true, disinterested friend, and as though in proof thereof persuaded him to appoint her husband his Master of the Horse, and finally, with a melting Irish tenderness and abandon that delighted him, had owned to a complete, overmastering love but three days before.

Up to the end of his life, it was a most extraordinary thing that women of mature years had an inexplicable charm for him. He never admired a woman who was not more fitted to be his mother than his love. Even Maria was six years older, possibly had Caroline of Brunswick herself been double the age she was matters might not have been so unfortunate as they were, and might have arranged themselves more amicably. She was handicapped from the first in being six years younger than he. His was a most strange taste.

"Thirty-two!" said he, musingly, late that night; the concert and big supper following had been long over.

"Thirty-two years!" repeated Lady Jersey, softly, as she stood beside him, watching the mystic sea that had secrets to tell that night to those who understood. She raised her eyes and with them told him silently that thirty-two was the most perfect age for a man to be.

He took her hand—both her hands—and her eyelashes dropped on to her artistic cheek. He pressed them softly.

Poor little grandchildren! You slept that night without grandmamma's last kiss, she had other if less suitable engagements.

"Mine, absolutely mine!" said the Prince.

"Your servant, your slave!" she whispered, "who would die but for her god's approval. Twelve more hours of heaven and then grey desolate blackness! Unutterable nausea! Apart from losing you to-morrow, my husband returns!" She shuddered.

"I have to return to duty too," said the Prince, in melancholy tones that he considered becoming to the occasion. "Until this week I did not know what joy this earth can hold."

"That you should think so!" murmured the lady, ecstatically. "That my sun-god should descend from his chariot and wrap me for a brief time in the flame of his love, my Phœbus, my unutterably adored!" And more silly balderdash came forth in the same strain.

"Oh, if we were free!" sighed he.

Lady Jersey sighed in company. "If I was," she corrected.

"I am bound in honour," he said.

She shook her head. "I will not condemn, perhaps I had better say nothing." She nevertheless continued, "But the woman who holds a man in self-interest, when he wishes, and it is for his advantage, that he should shake off her mistaken yoke, and yet pretends a love, has my contempt."

"Lady Jersey! Lady Jersey! Where are you?" The voice came gradually nearer, and the Prince vaulted lightly out of the open window of the dim curtained recess where they were standing and noiselessly disappeared over the dewy grass. He loved to cast a romantic atmosphere over and work dramatic incidents into all his intrigues.

"Thank God! Thank God!" said Lady Jersey, in a voice broken with emotion, when later he ventured back again, handing him a letter from her husband to say that an attack of gout would detain him from travelling for two or three days, perhaps longer.

"You will not leave me, you will not shatter my dream so soon?" she entreated, with tears in her still beautiful eyes.

"I am the knight dedicated to your service," he declared, "humble but aspiring, and so I must obey you in all things." This was gracious and charming, if scarcely true.

What unholy arts the lady practised we do not know. What she said, what she persuaded him into thinking—but she was successful so far, that instead of going to

town he wrote a letter, practically at her dictation, and sent it off in his stead.

"The wrench is unpleasant, I know," she had said, kneeling humble and adoring at his side, "but it is your duty to yourself, my Prince. Everyone has a certain *duty* to himself, and you, ah, how much more so. *She* ought to have broken it off without putting you to the disagreeable task. I should think she might have seen your satiety of her buxom charms. I am very sorry for her, poor Mrs Fat-fair-and-forty," she concluded, giving birth to the complimentary and illiterative description in common vogue to this very day.

The Prince laughed delightedly and thought it a very clever *mot*.

He had gone to Brighton from Weymouth, where the King was, and the day before his birthday had written a letter to Maria in his customary style appointing to meet her on the 13th at four o'clock at the house in Somerset Street, Portman Square, where Mrs "Nell" Jordan ruled with undisputed sway.

She had never spoken to this lady in her life and, to tell the truth, had no wish to, for before her conquest in '90 there had been scandal about the player woman. A very domestic scene, indeed, greeted her, though. Before the door opened, the well-known laugh in silver cadence rang out. "Nell" was sitting by the fire, charmingly untidy, with her heavy dark hair all disarranged, and she held in a cupid costume one of her numerous babies on her knees, before which the Duke of Clarence knelt in solemn adoration.

"Leave him!" she cried, "for a while. "He is as warm as any toast in a tankard; let him be.

> "'In summer time when leaves grown green,
> Down a-down a-down,
> And birds sing on every tree,
> Hey down, a-down a-down.
>
> Robin Hood went to Nottingham,
> Down—'"

She broke off her song suddenly, starting to her feet with the child in her arms.

"'Fore Gad! I'd forgotten all about you!" She plumped the astonished infant into the arms of his equally astonished father, and came forward, bundling up her hair with a vivid, brilliant smile. "Most barbarous of me, truly." There was a frank warmth about her welcome that was unconventional and charming.

"No, don't take him away," she cried suddenly, wheeling round to find the Duke and his burden sneaking off. "Sit down there and hold him; he will be good as gold. I love to see you nurse him, it *is* funny."

The gurgling child made great efforts to reach her. "Belay, belay," cried his involuntary nurse, jerking him back, "you must obey, quarter-deck orders, you know."

"He is a pretty boy," said Maria.

"George, we call him. Thank goodness he takes after me, he is always laughing, a cheerful soul. As for me, God forgive my mother—as your friend Mr Sheridan would say—but I think my father must have been an Irishman."

"But you are Irish!" cried Maria.

The lady winked expressively. "No more than you are, my dear. My mother was the daughter of a clergyman, good old gag, but true in this case. She ran away with my father to Ireland and married him, the more fool she. He was a scoundrel called Blande."

"Yes, Blande is Dora's real name," interposed the Duke.

"Ay. I started off with Nell Francis for a name, and when I came over to York to play that she-cat Abingdon had such a damned spite against me—cracked old crock—that I couldn't get my nose inside a playhouse, let alone go on. So mother said, 'Change your name—people will at least see you then; she won't get their ear first.' So I did, and used my own, but Wilkinson, he was the manager at York, called me Jordan because I'd crossed the water." Again the ringing laugh. "Then I came to London to play the Romp and Country Girl—King was my Moody—and now I'm a sailor's lass. That's the history of me.

> "'Then be constant and kind, nor your Polly forsake,
> Still your trousers I'll wash and your grog I'll make,'"

she trilled.

In the Shadow of the Purple

"George is late," said the Duke of Clarence, inconsequently.

"And he'll be later before he comes. He likes keeping me waiting. I can't stand that grand, haughty, fine brother of yours, my boy, he looks me through and through, any more than I can bear his Bardolph, but that's natural since he's been my manager. Mrs Fitzherbert, you must take my baby." She brought him across and laid him in the guest's lap. "We will dress him together, you and I. Now own he is a very, very pretty child. How many of your own have you got?"

"I haven't any."

"None! What a pity! Nothing holds a man when he begins to tire like children. I've proved it more than once."

"Dora!"

"Oh, dry up! That man would like to make me out a saint. I'm not a saint, except in staying with him, and in that, yes. Pardie! You don't know what it is to pine for the theatre, as I do sometimes of a night when I'm here all alone, it's awful. All my old cronies think I'm too swollen-headed for them now, and I can whistle for duchesses to come and call on me, like they do on you. Oh, for the dust, and the excitement, and the scenery! And a sausage and a pewter pot of porter between the acts. Sometimes I turn out all my dear old props. I'd sooner have that theatre smell that hangs round 'em any day than the attar of roses fine ladies like you think so much of. And when I do go and see a show, I could *cry*, I feel so out of place the wrong side of the rag." All the time, with quick, deft fingers, she was dressing the child. "Perhaps now I can come and see you sometimes. Oh, I can put on the fashionable air. I'll try and imagine I'm playing my Lady Betty, and mince and grimace with the finest of them. Lud, your Grace!" She sprang to her feet, and sailed across the room elegantly, waving Maria's fan. "Actresses, poor creatures, I pity more than I condemn. They have not the advantage of a virtuous up-bringing like *we* have had." She threw the fan on the table and was herself again. "That sort of thing." She came back to the baby, and

kissed the top of the Duke's head in passing. "It's an honest head," she said, "if a trifle soft."

A loud knock on the front door rang through the house. "That's him," they exclaimed simultaneously.

"And me this pretty figure! I'm going to dress, so that there is no excuse for him to say nasty things." She seized the child.

"When did you order the dinner for, then?" asked the Duke.

"I never ordered it at all."

"I hope it's a good one."

"Pardie! I left it all to your fine servants—they know all about grand ways far better than I do. Lud, I'm too mighty frightened of their bignesses to give them an order, and I doubt if they'd take it from me." She pattered quickly out of the room in her small, untidy slippers.

It was not the Prince, of course, but the letter concocted by Lady Jersey. A cruel, vindictive letter, full of veiled spite. As she read it, Maria knew instinctively it was not *his* unaided production.

"What does he say?" asked his brother. Then he looked at her sharply. "My timbers! What is the matter?"

She debated half an instant and then his friendly, simple face decided her, and she silently handed it to him.

He was bewildered in turn. "What the devil do you make of it? The dirty swab!"

"Oh, it's some woman!" she exclaimed passionately. "He never wrote it!"

"Girls always say that," he returned, with the would-be shrewdness of stupidity. He read it through again. "'Vast heavin'! I never could have believed such a thing. Had you quarrelled?"

She pushed her hand in the front of her dress. "Here is the letter he sent but yesterday. Read it."

He obeyed. "Nothing in this! It's inexplicable. Let's ask Dora."

"Oh, no! Please."

"But she is so very clever. I will tell her first."

"As you like."

"I'm going to see this matter through for you, my dear," he said warmly, in his bluff, breezy voice. "I know what you are thinking—'if only York was here;' I'm going to make up for him."

She smiled faintly as he patted her shoulder in a hearty, honest way.

"I am not surprised," said Mrs Jordan, when she came back with him. "I heard something of it this very day. I can tell you the name of the woman, too. An old sweetheart of mine I met this morning, just come from Brighthelmstone, was full of it."

"Indeed!" said Maria, coldly, pulling herself together with a mighty effort.

"Yes, the Irishwoman."

"You told me nothing," said the Duke. "I don't understand. What Irishwoman?"

"My dear boy, I don't tell you everything," returned the lady, coolly. "It's the Countess of Jersey."

"Lady Jersey! Impossible!"

"God's truth. Tom said the place down there is ringing with it."

"Lady Jersey! she must be sixty."

"More shame to her, then," returned Nell; "but what, then, I'm older than you?"

"I think," said Maria, "if you don't mind, I'll go home."

The Duke would have objected, had he not received from Mrs Jordan a slight nod behind her back. So he substituted, "Just as you like, Sister; and if you will let me, I'll see you there, if you don't mind." Which he did, refusing, with unconscious tact, to go in when they reached her door.

"If you like to go straight to Brighton to-morrow morning and have it out with him, my lass, I'll go with you," were almost his last words.

"Oh, no. I have some pride. He must come to me and apologise. I shall do nothing."

"Well, that's my advice. But anyhow, try and hearten up, my dear; it will come all right. Mind you send for me if I can ever be the least use. Willing all and every time to help a lady."

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH THERE IS A MOST FOOLISH QUARREL

"What woman draws you thus away from me?"

AFTER dispatching the letter, the Prince had some qualms of conscience. He wondered how she would take it; what she would say. Of course, he did not really mean what he had written, he told himself, he had only composed the epistle to try her; and, perhaps, it was as well she should realise that she had no *claim* on him at all, and was entirely dependent on his bounty. Some day he might wish, for State reasons, to marry, he could not tell. If only he could train her to wink at flirtations of a marked and pronounced character, a very little persuasion might be all that would be wanted to get her to connive also at what he was pleased to term a "political wife." But would she wink? that was what he was all in a fever of curiosity over. He remembered before, their first and only dispute, when Fox had denied the marriage in the House, and when he had learnt, with astonishment, that a virtuous woman can love intensely and yet keep her self-respect. It was a different development of the emotion from that to which he had been accustomed, and it had surprised him.

He tried to remember what Lady Jersey had dictated and he had written, and was amazed to find the precise words were already vague. Instinctively he knew that it had been very brutal, that if he had considered it in cold blood, or even read it once through, it would never have been sent.

The sentences returned piecemeal—fragmentary, "It is better we should part . . . a boy's folly of the moment, without substance . . . a disgrace, a tie of perpetual drag . . . you are continually thrown in my teeth, the

cause of my unpopularity . . . no claim, no wife, but if money required to purchase silence and the promise of no annoyance—"

No—it was not at all a nice letter. His sensitive Saxon face burned when he remembered the woman's venom that in a moment of madness, he had been persuaded to pen—he would have liked to recall it, though his wish was not strong enough to make him take active steps. Also, he did not want to break off connection altogether with Lady Jersey. She was soft and flattering, she smoothed him down the right way.

What a fool he had been to give Molly the opportunity to suspect, to be jealous. She was very jealous, poor creature—that was only natural, he decided with a gratified look in his glass, for he was at his toilet. So, mentally, he firmly made up his mind to—though he was in the wrong—stand on his dignity.

He was *free*, as Lady Jersey had told him—answerable, accountable to no one. Molly had been honoured by him as surely never woman in this world had been honoured before, by all means let her come to heel. The dog, unquestioning, obeys his master, nor speaks of right or wrong, and she—humble, insignificant—had scarce more right, no more right, than a faithful, affectionate dog.

On the whole, he was very pleased with himself, and had argued himself as being absolutely satisfied. Still, he wondered what she would do, and hourly he expected her to arrive.

Surprise Number One. He heard nothing for over a week and then his sailor brother walked in.

"What a fool you are, George," said he, after a somewhat stormy interview, "to let that old harridan bamboozle you. Why, the other, a steadier, trustier craft I never did see, nor one steadier to the helm—you've shipped a good many nasty seas together too, and now— You *are* a fool!"

"I never asked you for your opinion," returned George, angrily. "If you talk like this, I don't want you to stay—I never asked you to come here at all."

"Oh!" exclaimed the other. "Well, you can ask till you are black in the face, I don't intend to stay—let me tell

you that. It strikes me you're as demented as the King to behave as you are doing—and having told you and done my duty, I'm off. One thing—if you act like a man and see her before she leaves town, she may forgive you; afterwards there will be a difficulty."

"Is she coming here?"—curiously. "Going to force her way into my house without—after that letter—"

"Look here, George! I'm darned if you know the kind of vessel you have to tackle. There's more pride in her little finger than in all your great hulk—pride of the proper sort, not conceit—let me tell you that. You are burning your boats behind you, my lad; if you do not try and make it up soon, mark my words, you will be sorry yet. She'll let you down lightly—more lightly than you deserve, I'll go bail. You can't really care a rap for that old beldame, and surely anything is better than sailing under false colours, You're ashamed, out of mistaken bravado, to pull down the pirate rag—that's what it is."

"Leave my presence, leave my house!" shouted the other, white with passion. "How dare you!"

"I'm going, Brother. I've had my say. Never forget she's a stay-sail." He picked up his hat and strode out, feeling he had done his best. He had honestly tried to in a muddling way.

Instead of going to town, the Prince returned to Weymouth on a duty-visit to his parents, and especially the Queen. He was in want of money, and being for the moment on excellent terms with her, hoped that she could assist him.

After a few days' assiduous attention, during which time he accompanied them dutifully back to Windsor, he broached this, only to meet with a point-blank refusal. "It was not in her power," she said, besides she feared the King too much. Why not speak to him direct, she suggested, as for the moment there was peace between them.

The Prince made a wry face and intimated that he considered that to do so would be practically waste of time.

"Think of something else, oh, my mother. You are so clever," he said ingenuously.

"Zat is ze only sing dat I can zeggest," reiterated her

Majesty. "Zere is nodding else. You are oldair now, you can but *try*." She shrugged her shoulders.

"And when he refuses?"

"He vill not."

"What do you know?"

"I should not tell you," said the Queen.

"Why not?"

"'E 'as 'is price, of coourse. He 'as wait for you to spek first six mont' an' more; he knew you would 'ave to."

"What is it?"

"He want you to marry," said she, coming to the point. "It is your 'ope, your one chance, one eberyting."

The Prince started. True, he had himself considered this alternative in the depth of his own heart, but to have it given voice to in this commonplace way! "The—the *other!*" he stammered.

"Ze odaire! She moust 'ave know all along—'ave zeen it comin'. She moust 'grin and bear him' as zay say here. As 'er betaires 'ave done."

"It would help me out of all my difficulties," he mused, unconsciously aloud.

"A course he would," said the Queen. "You could vash ze slate and start fresh—propair. Ze country would 'ave to be generous."

"Well, mother, I will see the King," he said.

Her Majesty smiled, well pleased. When he had gone, she sat down and wrote herself to Lady Jersey. Little escaped her, and she knew all of the scandal that had been forming the staple of conversation and conjecture at Brighton the week before. In Lady Jersey she found a woman after her own heart, an *intriguante* in every sense of the word. With the other, on the rare occasions they had met, something—some subtle sympathy—had been wanting, and here it was different. Without showing her hand too much, or committing herself on the paper, she insinuated very clearly what her wishes were—at least, quite enough for the astute woman addressed to comprehend. She herself honestly considered marriage the best thing possible for the Prince. Having thus put into action this questionable influence, she quietly waited events.

There is a most Foolish Quarrel

George had his interview with his father, in which both tried to keep their tempers, and both succeeded very ill indeed. It was a new thing for them to be chatting amicably, and before they separated the King's tones were hectoring, domineering, abusive, and the Prince's impertinent and flippantly disrespectful. Nothing was arranged when they parted.

Then he swung off for comfort and encouragement to Lady Jersey, who had joined her husband in town, but as her head was completely turned by the Queen's letter, that she had received only half an hour before, he found her less satisfying than usual, and the new rather condescending air of proprietorship, the outcome of it (for she was secretly delighted that her Majesty should think that her power with him was paramount), jarred and irritated him. *He* liked to patronise. The sort of hothouse air about her, the scented, refined artificialities of their intrigue that day did not suit him, it palled for the first time. He saw the soil this tropical plant sprung from, and turned away, disgusted, unsatisfied. He felt he could only breathe freely when he stood outside her house.

On the spur of the moment, he mounted his horse and rode far away out of town into the green breezy country, not returning till the shadows were lengthening, and the afternoon was far advanced, muddy, tired and hungry. He then rode to Maria's straightway. "Goldenhair is best, after all," thought he. "There is no one like her in all the world." In short, he was the spoilt child who, having been naughty and got tired of it, comes back to be petted and forgiven, and forget all about it.

But he had not counted on her. She had always told herself that, with a nature so volatile and a mind so conveniently forgetful as his, she could never keep her power by lightly passing over his faults, negligences or perfidies against herself—that is, if she wished to retain his respect as well as his love, or, indeed, either for long, and at this moment she was very bitter. There had been minor little escapades, of course, during the nine years of their married life, but nothing like this.

He received a shock when he reached the corner. All

down the Lane, as he clattered over the cobble stones, had he pictured his joyous warm welcome. She might be diffident, and even angry at first; it would soon pass. She might cry, and how quickly he would kiss those tears away. This delicious uncertainty, for she would so soon unbend, he thought, only charmed him all the more.

Rid of his dusty riding dress (he could expatiate on how, in his hurry to see her, he had not waited to change), in the dear, old, low-ceilinged room, with the big china bowls full of flowers and the firelight dancing—yes, certainly there would be a fire, the evening was going to be chilly—and she herself would be there to wait on him, as she loved to do, when they were quite, quite alone, all tears and smiles, and delightful in her pert, maidservantish airs.

It was a very pretty picture.

In front of the door there stood a cart—two carts. A couple of rough men were hauling a great wooden case from the door. Was it possible she was being sold up? With what a lofty air he would dismiss all the Jews and dealers there, and settle the matter like a good fairy. He dismounted at the corner of the street and dismissed the gentleman in attendance on him, with horses and groom. "I shall not return to-night," he said. "Let someone be sent for my orders the first thing in the morning." Then he waited until they were almost out of sight before going to the door.

"Where is your mistress?"

"Upstairs—that is, you cannot see her, Sar," said the man, a stranger, who did not know him.

"She will see me," he returned, attempting to push past, but the servant, a big, thick-set negro, resisted stoutly.

"She will see no one, Sar," he reiterated, planting his burly form in the door. "She am going away."

Just when he was thinking this almost beyond a joke, the French servant Céleste came to the door of the inner hall with a dressing-bag in her hand. She had a bonnet and cloak on. "*Mère de Dieu!* it is *Monsieur le Prince*," she screamed, dropping the case in her excitement. "Stand on one side, *cochon*."

At last permitted to enter, he repeated the question, and

scarcely waiting for her answer, ran upstairs two steps at a time.

Alas! alas! The fireplace was black and desolate—there was no smell of roses, for the blue and white bowls were locked away. All the pretty furniture was shrouded in brown holland, and the windows were nakedly curtainless. There was no tempting table near the fire, daintily laid with fine white damask, delicate china, and thin glass for one. So sure had been his imaginary vision that he looked half expecting to see it waiting ready. On its bare shiningness, there was but a snowflake-like handkerchief, a purse and a scent-bottle.

True, the lady of the dream was there, but even she was different, clad in an austere dark travelling gown, sombre, depressing.

"What's all this silly farce?" he began angrily, disappointed, then, changing his tone to one more gentle—"Did you think I was still at Brighton, and find you could not do without me any longer, and so were going to look for me? I have come, you see, instead, to you, dear."

"I am not going to Brighton," she negatived, looking at him quietly, sadly, and without moving from her stand on the hearthrug.

He came across to her with a mock childish diffidence. "Please, Princess Goldenhair, I'm a good boy now."

"How am I to know that?"

"Come, *Mariechen*, you can trust me, you know. I'm monstrously sorry about that beastly letter. Have you it still? Let us tear it up and burn it together, and forget all about it."

"Oh, George, my dearest—I cannot trust you, that is what pains me so. What ever possessed you, dear—that awful old woman! She must be twenty years older than I am."

"She is a great beauty, a noted toast."

"She may have been in the reign of your great grandfather. I told you, before you married me, I should grow old and you would tire, but I never expected a rival like that."

"It is all past now—all broken off and done with," he protested, and he really meant it at that moment. "It has

taught me this lesson—there is no one like you in all the world. A man is different from a woman, *Schatz*, so don't argue it from too narrow a standpoint—I've never loved anyone in all my life but you. Let me turn over a new leaf—I'll honestly keep straight from to-day."

"But will you? Yes, you love me and I love you, but that is not the reason I should lightly pass over this business. You may change your mind again and make it up with her to-morrow."

"Never! never!" he asserted.

"Oh, my dear, in yielding to that designing creature's wiles you have committed a grievous mortal sin. I don't want to be narrow-minded, or hard on you, don't imagine it is of myself I am thinking when I say this, but I must prove that you mean it when you thus affirm yourself repentant. I thought you really meant your letter—when you wrote it I suppose you did."

"She dictated it nearly all," he interrupted.

"I thought so. Well, dear, believing anyhow that you intended to abide by it, I had arranged to go away—as Brighthelmstone was closed to me—to Margate. The house is shut up, as you see. To-night I had arranged to sleep at Lady Stanton's house, so as to be able to start to-morrow the first thing, and I shall keep to that arrangement, I shall go still. I have forgiven you so often before, George, this sort of thing must cease—I am your wife, though you seem to forget it. I am not to be played fast and loose with and tossed aside like an old glove. I know your position is exceptional. Married people require domesticity—though, perhaps, if you had seen more of me you would have tired even quicker."

"Dear love, I have not tired, I could not tire."

"I can forgive everything, but, for your own sake, I ought not at once to forget—that is why I put you on this three months' probation and that is why I will not see you during that time."

And nothing would move her from this. He threatened, entreated, cajoled in vain.

"If you love me still so much, you can prove it in three months' trial," she said; "if three months are too long, it

only proves the unstability of your passion." She threw back her veil and let him kiss her once. Then he handed her into the waiting coach and watched it drive away, whilst she flung both arms round the faithful Céleste, and burying her face on her shoulder, sobbed till the woman was frightened, and he called up a chair that was plying for a fare and went home.

He was not expected, and in his dressing-room found a much-trusted valet parading in front of a cheval glass with his breast adorned with half a dozen of his own glittering orders.

Having relieved his feelings by clouting the man's head, he read a little scented note that was awaiting him, written on gilt-edged paper.

"My husband has suddenly found himself well enough to consent to be carried off to dine and sleep in the wilds of Berkshire. *Dieu soit bénit!* You were angry with me this morning, prove your forgiveness now. I shall be alone to-night. Come."

"Damn it all, why not?" he asked himself irritably, and then rang to order his *vis-à-vis*.

CHAPTER XXII

SOME OF THE RESULTS OF THE QUARREL

"No marriage can dissolve the bond between us."

THE King sat in his dressing-room. His toilet was finished, and on its completion the Queen had joined him there.

"There is no one," said the King, with a solemn, judicial air, "there is no one who would be more pleasing to me than my dear sister's child, Caroline Amelia Augusta, my own niece."

"There is no one," returned the Queen, "who would be more pleasing to me than my niece, my brother's daughter Louise."

The Royal couple eyed each other belligerently.

"Impossible!" pronounced the King. "Your niece is betrothed."

"My brother would break off the betrothal for me, his favourite sister."

"My niece is *not* betrothed."

"Nor likely to be, if she takes after your dear sister," snapped the Queen.

"I have decided on Caroline," said the King, with a wave of his hand. "Eh, what?"

"I have decided on Louise," said the Queen, with a click of her teeth, as though her mouth shut with a spring.

"Supposing, then, we let the boy decide," said the King. "Eh, eh?"

"In other words you agree to my niece," said her Majesty. "He would not certainly take yours, having the choice."

"If the betrothal cannot be broken—"

"There are other Protestant princesses, we can find a third," asserted the lady, determined not to yield one iota.

The King stirred uneasily. Arguments always made his poor weak head ache. "I was never more surprised in all my life," he said in a conciliatory tone, "than when he agreed yesterday."

"Made the offer, I thought you said."

"Well, well, made the offer. Rudolf was powdering my hair, and he walked in, never knocking, without a word! I was astounded. He has never come in like that before, he has not been in this room for fifteen years, I think. He was very muddy, had been cub-hunting, I believe he said—"

"You've told me all this before," interrupted the Queen, rudely.

"My dear, I have something to say, please let me tell you my way," he protested, for, as is very common with people who have suffered from loss of reason, he would repeat things over and over again. "He sat down in that chair over there. 'If you won't pay up on any other terms, old boy, I'll run in double harness, but God knows what the end will be if you do force it.' I think those were his very words," repeated the King, with hurt dignity. "That my own son should force his way into my private tiring-room and address me like that!"

"I asked him whom he would wish to marry, and he said, 'By the Lord Harry, damned if I care, that's your look-out—'"

"But he has consented, that is the great thing," interrupted his mother, determined to make the best of it.

"Yes, he has consented. It is for the best?"

"Undoubtedly. In fact, the only thing possible," said the Queen.

It may be wondered what had brought about this more than inexplicable change in only a month? If one did not know the character of the Prince, so changeable, so easily led, the riddle would have to be laid aside as impossible to

solve. Maria always put it down to Lady Jersey, and undoubtedly it was so. She was under the patronage of the Queen, she had received her orders and it paid her best to obey them.

As for the Queen, she was remarkably shrewd-headed and clever, till she let an emotion master her, such an emotion as Maria's undisputed sway and absolute influence with the Prince excited—jealousy.

She intended to shake the power to its foundations, and, without absolutely abolishing it, yet weaken it greatly.

And apart from that, from an unbiassed standpoint, it must be admitted that a marriage was the best thing in the world for him. It would restore the confidence of the country, it would pay his debts, and it would, it was to be hoped, forge a strong, new link between him and the nation in providing a direct heir to the throne.

Regarding the subject only in the sentimental light of Maria's interest, she herself was greatly to blame. She ought never to have left the Prince. To such a weak, unstable person, living always for the moment, it was impossible to teach a lesson. As well might it have been attempted with a butterfly.

She gave an impetus to her own ultimate doom when she drove away with such bitter tears through the Kentish hop-land. For what was the result? At the end of a week Lady Jersey was stronger than ever, and having had one severe fright, was very very cautious and infinitely more wary in what she said and did than before.

Painted alluringly by her, the marriage seemed such a delightful easy way of getting straight again, of getting back the bright, approving looks, applause and admiration he childishly loved. But first, let it be said, he tried every possible other means, and bargained, or attempted to do so, with both Pitt and the King. For, of course, the real trouble was want of money. His exchequer was in a deplorable condition again; bills and tradesmen were pressing more than ever. His dearest friends for the moment were those who lent him most money, and he openly offered an Irish peerage and £10,000 on the death of the King to anyone who would lend him

five thousand then. And having tried all honourable and dishonourable means, and finding the King stubbornly adamant, he abruptly, as his Majesty has explained, consented one day and then let things drift.

But the Queen was wrong when she said he was certain to choose her niece. Already the Princess Caroline had, in a half-formed vague idea, presented herself to his mind. He had heard rather flattering accounts of her from the Duke of Clarence. Lady Jersey was very eager for her, having heard quite to the contrary. She wished him to marry to secure the downfall of Maria and to be able to say she reformed him, and in her own interest she wished him to choose a plain, unsympathetic, uncongenial wife so that she should suffer no diminution in her rule—that he should come to her for everything.

Maria, meanwhile, was under the direction of a cold, ascetical Catholic priest. She was obeying him implicitly. He was absolutely incapable, and he detested the Prince as a *roué*, a profligate, a *Protestant*. The three months' probation was his idea, and a very silly idea, too. So when George "broke out" again and the Jersey scandal became greater than ever, he simply wrote "I told you so" in a letter that humiliated her and awoke a proud vanity that caused her to respond a curt, cold answer to the only letter —a sort of feeler—the Prince vouchsafed her during her absence.

By the last week in October she was back in town again, and, to judge of her appearance, the change had done her singularly little good. As yet she had heard not the faintest whisper of the marriage, for the constitution of the delicate negotiation was far too young and tender to be exposed as yet to the cold wind of criticism.

A most kind, a most affectionate, friendly letter from the Duchess of Devonshire, who was then at Chatsworth, reached her almost immediately on her return. "We have been friends—honest, real friends—for ten years," she wrote, "and you must always regard me in the same kind light and let *nothing* ever change it." She put that letter aside, not then understanding its true significance.

The next morning she rode out. A lady wreathed in

friendly smiles and clad in a vivid green habit came across to her mounted on a very showy chestnut. It was Mrs Jordan.

"How brave you are!" she cried in admiration. "Ah, there is nothing to give a woman confidence like a plain gold ring, and you have *that*, eh? I envy you believing what they say. Forgive me, that was nasty, and I hope you will believe I mean it from the bottom of my heart when I say I am very sorry for you."

"I do not wish to speak of it, Madam, to any of my friends or—acquaintances."

"You won't find anyone to talk about anything else, even to you," said Mrs Jordan, bluntly. "People that *know*, though a lot do not yet."

"I am afraid everyone knows it too well," said Maria, bitterly.

"Do you? Why, lots of folk I meet I can see have no idea. Strenuous efforts are being made to keep it secret."

"It will be known to everyone in the end."

"Yes, naturally, but it will not matter then. Well, I'm glad anyway that you have so much self-control and take it so coolly; it is much best, I should be at home crying *quarts* if it was me. And mark my words, it's a put-up business between snuffy Charlotte and that old harridan Jersey, I hear they are as thick as Government. *She* especially is at the bottom of it all. Bye-bye!"

"There is something else!" said Maria to herself, with white lips. "Something I have not heard!" She rode on as though in a dream without noticing the people stare at her. "What can it be? I had better know at once—find out. Who can I ask?—who can tell me? Sir John Lade—Major Hanger—No, I will ask none of his friends. Oh, what can—"

"Mrs Fitzherbert! I did not know you were back in town, or I should have paid my respects with alacrity."

The speaker was a thin, pale man, unostentatiously dressed in plain good black and well yet quietly mounted; he was the private chaplain attached to the Spanish Embassy.

"Oh, Father! I was going myself to see you this morning. I only came up on Tuesday."

He turned and rode beside her. "It is only what you must have expected," he said, after a few minutes' silence, staring straight in front of him. "Personally, I wonder it did not happen a long time ago. I am glad you have the courage to bear it with Christian fortitude. Honestly, I think it is for your good, for the welfare of your immortal soul."

"Father, in mercy, tell me what?"

He looked at her in astonishment. "What else than the contemplated marriage of the Prince of Wales with his cousin?" he asked.

She rode straight on. She seemed to be riding for years, and years were like centuries, the earth grew old and older yet! All the moisture seemed to be sucked out of it with a horrid, hissing sound that rang in her head, as she still continued on that straight, hard, endless road. Then the air seemed to go too, and in the place of the parchedness and dry dust that had filled her mouth and stung her eyes came suffocation, and everything turned blood-red. Everything seemed a kaleidoscope; houses, trees, sky were mixed in painful confusion and the stars dropped down one by one, thud, thud, thud, like horses' hoofs. Her heart had stopped; she could feel her hands and feet grow cold and the rest of her body all numb. And then in the shadow flickered with light, clear and distinct she saw the Prince's face. With a cry she tried to get to him, and struggled vainly with the forces of ten thousand devils which all seemed holding her back. His clear-cut profile disappeared as she made one last superhuman effort to reach him. She was free! falling, falling, down into the bowels of the earth. Strange dark shapes were all about her, there was a crash. She knew no more.

"Did you not know?" the priest had asked, awestruck, as he rode beside her. He stared at her stony face, she seemed oblivious of his existence. "Madam, I—"

He checked himself and rode on silently. "She is going home," he decided. Reaching the maelstrom of Hyde Park Corner, he would have checked her, but she urged

herself madly forward towards a carriage that was being very rapidly driven up Constitution Hill; he, hurrying in her wake, was an instant checked by the traffic, and arrived to find the air filled with the frightened snortings of pawing horses. Her own mare was down, she in imminent danger, and the driver, with his pair on their haunches, shouting for someone to drag her away, lying motionless, from beneath those perilous hoofs. As he came up, the door dashed open and the occupant, with reckless bravery, threw himself forward in the teeth of the danger, and as he seized her he was himself nearly stricken to the ground by a terrific blow on the shoulder.

It all happened so quickly that before a crowd had time to gather, rescuer and rescued had disappeared into the vehicle, which, turning almost immediately, drove off. And nothing was left of the adventure save one servant belonging to the carriage and her own groom, who were both bending over the still prostrate mare, and himself, the priest, dazed and bewildered, having had no active share in the incident, and now staring in front of him, amazed.

She opened her eyes wonderingly as her senses came dimly back, conscious before anything of his passionate kisses. She looked around inquiringly at the softly-padded sides and roof and the windows that gave a faint, pleasant light, for the blinds were drawn. With languid curiosity she conjectured where she was, then memory came with a rush. "My beloved! I have had such a horrible dream," she exclaimed, clinging to him, and then fell to crying softly.

"Thank God you are safe," he murmured, straining her in his arms. "Dear heart, what caused it? Did your horse bolt?"

"Is there truth in it, then?" she asked in return, "in *that*, what he said? Great Heaven! I was thinking it was only a dream."

"I do not know what he said, Maria," he answered gravely. "I only know that, as I was driving along, I saw you flash past the window, the coach nearly tilted over, and I sprang out to see you almost under it."

Some of the Results of the Quarrel

The carriage stopped where he had directed it, outside her own house. She seemed faint, and so, despite his bruised shoulder, now throbbing painfully, he picked her up and strode into the house with her, as though she were but a child, and up the stairs to lay her on the sofa in her own room.

"*Mariechen!* oh, my dearest!" he exclaimed brokenly, kneeling beside her. "Thank Heaven I was there to save you from that horrible danger."

She flung herself into his arms.

"George! George!" she cried wildly, "oh, say it is not true, that it is a base, malicious lie! Dearest, if you love me, if you have ever loved me, I implore you to deny it! I would sooner have you dead!"

"*Meine Frau*, compose yourself. What is agitating you, dear?"

"Ah, you call me that! In itself a contradiction of what that man said. Think! he told me that you, my husband, were going to sacrifice all truth, all honour, spit in the face of justice, abandon your self-respect, and sink from all purity, nobility and virtue, to something I cannot name. Knowing everything (in confidence), he stared me calmly in the face, and told me you—that you whom I would have trusted before all the world—are going to be married! But it is not true, dear—I know it is not true. Forgive me for listening to him. And oh, for Heaven's sake let me hear the denial from your own lips."

"It will make no difference to us," he murmured embarrassedly. "Nothing could, Molly."

"God! It is true, then? You—who are mine, mine! my wedded husband, and have been for nine long years—are the betrothed of another woman, and oh, that I should live to hear you own it, and plead it will make no difference! How can you say it?—how can you do it? You who swore so much and loved me so—once. I warned you that you would tire, that this would come, and yet you insisted, you swore to me solemnly and sacredly that as your wife you loved me, so as your wife you would ever regard me. Why could you not have left me alone instead of stealing all my heart, my life itself, to throw me on the

world thus, broken-hearted? If you wanted a light-o'-love, there were many ladies of rank and title with husbands agreeable enough—look at Frances Jersey—women, in fact, of every class to smile at your word. But I—I loved you differently—I trusted you so."

"It is not settled," he said, "only spoken of as an easy way to pay my debts, and it can and shall be stopped. You had gone away and left me, Molly—I thought you did not care."

"You thought I did not care! Dear God! Listen. I was advised, I was told it was best to go, to insist on that wretched three months. I did as I was told, I took that advice—fool that I was—and this is the result. There is no one who can advise between man and wife, there is no one who can give relative value to all the petty pros and cons. Why did I trust to an outsider? how could he understand all the manifold little twists and turns of you? I wanted to stay, my whole heart said stay, and I should have taken it for a guide, and dragged in no third."

"Oh, that you had," he said.

"Nothing on my part shall ever keep me from you again, dear. I shall do what I think, feel, know to be right. But what is the good of talking about it, if you are lost absolutely to me? I have been proud and wrong, but I have no pride from to-day. I beg, I entreat, I implore of you to cancel this betrothal. I cannot lose you, dear; don't ask me to bear that. Oh, thank God we have no children. I never said that before, did I? Yet, had I given them to you, you might have stayed—you might have stayed!"

"Hush, hush! you speak as though I wished it, *meine Geliebte!*"

"Have I been cold to you? Have I been a fretful, rebellious wife? Have I not considered you always? Oh, tell me how I have failed and I will remedy it, lay any command on me and I will obey, oh, so gladly, only don't leave me. I have loved you so all these years, don't put this woman between us."

He laid his head against her. "My dear, I have wandered far, I have strayed weakly," he whispered, "but it is not until I lay my head on your sweet breast

that I am at rest once again. Here only is absolute peace for me. Darling, I said to you in September that a man is different to a woman—I don't want to go over the same weary ground again. Sweet wife, let love, all-satisfying love, suffice for you and I. You say you have no pride, there can be no pride 'twixt us, we are so much each other's, we are but the distinct halves of a perfect whole—that is, if I am to you what you are to me. Speak not of 'light-'o-love,' the word is ugly even in your mouth—loathsome — impossible applied to you. Let me marry the little German girl, it can make no change in our lives. I will come just as often, I do not ask you to part with me —it would punish me far more than you. Leave it all to me—let us be happy."

"What a sweet, insidious poison there is in your words; how fatally easy." She pushed him away and staggered to her feet. "But no, no, that must not be. We must both have pride of the right sort in our love, pride to keep it as pure and unsullied as it has always been. All shadow of a threatened stain must be wiped out before you come here again. You say it can be stopped, this betrothal?"

"I believe and hope it can," he said. "I will do my utmost."

"And if it cannot it must be good-bye between us." He would have interrupted her, but she continued, "It must indeed. You will break it off?"

"It can, it must, it *shall* be broken," he declared vehemently, though he knew matters had gone too far for him to draw back without great risk. "Naturally, she kicks at first," he thought. "She will come round."

But would she?

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NET CLOSES

"This marriage is political."

THE Prince and Mrs Fitzherbert were in council with the Queen. It was at Kew. The council was really over, and the three sat silently.

On the table were two documents; one was an original letter, the other a copy of one. I will give them both, for they tell their own story. The copy comes first.

"MADAM,—The King, my father, whom I highly respect and esteem, has announced to me that your hand is destined for me. I am obliged by the imperious force of circumstances to own that this intelligence has thrown me into despair, and my candour does not allow me to conceal my sentiments from you. I hope that when you are acquainted with them, you will aid me in breaking the ties which would unite us only to render us unhappy, and which will be in your power to oppose, since I am unable to do so. You, Madam, are adored by your parents; I am aware that they have allowed you the liberty of refusing all the princes who have been proposed to you in marriage—refuse me also, I conjure you, in the name of pity, to which I know you are no stranger. You do not know me, Madam, you, therefore, can have no cause to lament my loss. Learn, then, the secret and unhappy situation of the Prince whom they wish you to espouse. I cannot love you, I cannot make you happy; my heart has long since ceased to be free. She who possesses it is the only woman to whom I could unite myself agreeable to my inclinations. You would find in me a husband who placed all his affections upon another. If this secret, which I name to you in confidence, does not

cause you to reject me, if ambition, or any other motive of which I am ignorant, causes you to condescend to the arrangements of my family, learn that, as soon as you have given an heir to the throne, I will abandon you, never to meet you any more save in public. I will then attach myself to the lady whom I love and whom I will not leave. Such, Madam, is my last and irrevocable resolution; if you are the victim of it, you will be a willing victim, and you cannot accuse me of having deceived you.—I am, Madam, with great truth, yours sincerely, GEORGE P."

And this was the answer received only that morning; badly-written and ill-spelt:—

"MY LORD AND COUSIN,—I cannot express to your Royal Highness the feelings of surprise which your letter has afforded me, neither can I rely entirely upon what it contains, because the accompanying letter of the good King, your father, is so very opposite in its meaning. I thought that the ties of relationship which exist between us would have obliged your Royal Highness to treat with delicacy and honour the Princess whom your King destines for you. For my own part, my Lord, I know my duty, and I have not the power or the wish to break the laws which are wished to be imposed upon me. I, therefore, have decided upon obeying the wishes of those who have the right to dispose of my person. I submit, at the same time, to the consequences with which your Highness threatens me. But if you could read the heart to which you impart such anguish, you would, perhaps, have feelings of remorse for this barbarous treatment, in which your Royal Highness appears to boast. I am now resolved to wait from time and our union, the just regard I will endeavour to merit, and I trust that your regret for what you have written, will in some measure avenge the wrongs you have so wantonly committed. Believe me, my Lord, that I shall not cease to offer my prayers for the happiness of your Royal Highness; mine will be perfect if I can but contribute to yours. —I am for life your most devoted cousin,

"CAROLINE AMELIA AUGUSTA OF BRUNSWICK."

Of the three who mused so silently that grey November afternoon, the Queen was secretly highly delighted. Except that she detested Caroline, and was bitterly disappointed about not being able to get her own way in the matter of her niece Louise, except for this one bitter drop, everything was turning out just as she had planned. So now she shed the light of her countenance on the humiliated Mrs Fitzherbert to strengthen her case in every possible way. When the Prince had come flying to Windsor, in his wild, incoherent style swearing he had suddenly changed his mind and that nothing would ever induce him to marry, instead of getting alarmed, she had quietly, to all appearance, acquiesced. Only she advised him to say nothing to the King. "He would be crosser zan evaire, if 'e sought you vould humiliate zat ugly creature 'e zink zo mooch of," she said.

"If she would only refuse me!" he exclaimed, giving voice, to the idea that had been forming in his brain all that day.

"*Ach!* 'if.' Zat leetle word he mean a lot."

Her Majesty, of course, knew perfectly well that that was very improbable. That the Duke would allow his daughter to relinquish so brilliant a future, even did she herself wish it, was most unlikely. So she felt quite safe, when he penned his urgent letter, and sure of the tenor of the answer, whilst he fumed and impatiently conjectured. She sent for Lady Jersey; who came with alacrity and quite free of her lackadaisical airs. The purport of what she said to this excellent woman was "bide your time. If he has been neglectful of late, he shall come back to you, I will see to that. You have managed the first part of this very well; believe me, you shall not find your Queen ungrateful. Would you like to be a lady-in-waiting to the Princess?"

"Madam!" exclaimed Lady Jersey, "oh, Madam!"

"It shall be arranged zen," said her Majesty, graciously.

And so as to have complete control, not only in herself, but of all the channels that influenced the Prince, she saw also Maria, to whom she was as nice and kind and sweet as a woman could be—one might say she was motherly. She expressed great hopes that the Princess would decline the

offer Lord Malmesbury was speeding from Holland to make. "She must, indeed, be a bold face 'uzzy if she do not, and drow 'erself like zat into ze arms of ze man zat doose not vant 'er. But 'er moothaire is an 'orrible, abominable ting, and I much think she so too."

And now the answer had come.

Maria sat by the Queen, who held her hand in an affectionate way and gave it deceitful little squeezes. Ignorantly, she considered this great lady the kindest, faithfullest friend she had, and she was passionately, lovingly grateful. Besides, was she not the Queen, and, most of all, was she not the Prince's mother?

That third person sat moodily on a sofa kicking up the corner of a rug.

"Vell, ve know now," said the Queen.

"Yes, we know now," repeated Maria, in a dull voice.

"I'll make her life a damned hell for her, you see!" burst from her future husband. "She shall curse the day she ever was born!"

"My dearest!"

"George, be not so mooch a fool, talk sense if thou must talk at all."

"I don't want to marry that horrid, ugly German; I don't want to marry anyone. Am I not married already?"

"I wish you had shown me a copy of that letter before you sent it," said Maria. "I wish, since it has done no good, it had never been sent at all. I wonder"—with a woman's curiosity—"what she really is like."

He pushed his fingers in his pocket and pulled out a miniature case, throwing it across on to the table with such an impatient jerk as to crack the thin ivory on which the portrait was painted. "Have you seen that?" he asked, as she pressed the spring.

"*Mein leiber Gott!*" exclaimed her Majesty, in disgust, "ze sight of 'er moon face it make me *sick*."

The clock struck and was answered faintly by the chime of Kew Church.

Maria made a preparatory movement.

"Your Majesty has been very kind to me," she began in an uncertain voice. "I—"

The Queen threw her arms round her.

"I know, feel, understan'," she exclaimed, kissing her; "and always I am thy fren', for I loove thee mooch. Come to me—but secret—all, any time and anyding, eberyding for ze I vill do."

"Madam, oh, Madam!"

"Zink of 'im," said the Queen. "It is for 'is goot, try an' zee dat zat is so."

"Burn me if I can see it!" interrupted her son. "Do stop all that plaguy cuddling, you two."

"I will go now," said Maria.

"*Gott behüte und segne Dich*," murmured the Queen, clinging to her. "You vill remembaire?"

"I shall always remember dearly, lovingly, your Majesty's sweet, gracious kindness."

"Goot-bye, goot-bye!" exclaimed the other, accentuating each word with a kiss.

Then the Prince opened the long window that reached to the ground, and she passed out unseen, as she had come.

"Why were you so impatient?" she asked, as he shut the window after them.

"Because you are so easily gulled. She's such an abominable liar, so confoundedly double-faced, you cannot believe or trust a solitary word she utters."

And in this there was some truth, for said her Majesty to herself as she watched them rapidly disappear into the chill gloom, "*Ach!* vat a fool she is, zat voman!" Then, "An', *mein Gott*, vat a fool 'e is."

She turned away and walked to the fireplace, and, dropping into a chair, held her shapely tiny feet, her one beauty, to the warm blaze. "Zay are both such fools, I do not know vich of ze two is ze biggest," she declared finally.

They walked on silently.

She had not thought he was coming, yet she felt she could hardly scruple in the presence of the Queen, and so her first objection sank back unuttered—after all, it was the last time. She stole a glance at him as he strode beside her—handsome, taciturn, wretched—and started steeling herself with good resolutions for the coming interview.

The Net Closes

They met no one, not even a stray gardener, for it was Sunday afternoon. Presently they emerged from the King's immediate demesne into the deer park. It was but just past the dangerous seasons and he kept a sharp, wary eye open, though nothing came to alarm them. The surroundings were coldly depressing, dull, uniform, grey. A river fog rising was already developed enough to obscure any of the remaining sunset. Dead were all the flowers in the garden they had but just passed through; dead and brown all the wet, brittle grass, all the dank, sodden leaves under their feet, and overhead the stripped branches rattled like the distant sound of dead men's bones. The river sighed desolately and wearily as it travelled on its endless journey, trouble and care seemed to have affected it too, faded were all its pretty shades and checked all its dimpled audacities. Muddy and sullen, it wandered now between the brown banks and drab broken tangle of reeds, leaves, and miscellaneous garbage.

They kept on its banks until he opened a wicket for her to pass through, then after a few more paces she stood still.

"Let it be here," she said.

He looked around as though recalling it.

"It was summer time that day nearly twelve years ago," he said, "early summer, and there was still chiefly 'promise' writ on the landscape."

"I did not stop then on account of our having first met here on this spot, but because you must come no further, you must not be seen with me now. Though you are right, it *is* a fitting place. It is winter now, the time of rest, for all prophecies are fulfilled."

"The winter passes."

"Seldom the winter of a life, though I think yours will, and ah, never the winter of a love."

"Winter is cold, our love can have no winter."

"No, it is dead."

"Yes, it must be dead, though we feel it still. As yet it is so near, it was so lately with us; we are still warm from the touch of its tender fingers."

"And I thought that day my life was over, and it had not begun."

"If only I had never ridden this way that fatal day! I have always been a curse to you! I wish you had never seen me."

"I do not wish that, I never could wish that. And I only go back to what I was then, dear, so do not trouble for me, the same tranquillity, the same peaceful monotony—"

"And the same loneliness?"

"Yes."

"To dream of Edward?"—half bitterly.

"I can never dream of anyone but *you* again."

"*Mariechen*, stay with me, darling. I am like a ship without a rudder, as Clarence would say, when you are away. He once called you my stay-sail, and he was right."

"Impossible. Oh, no, never. I could not take an equivocal position, and that is what it would be, though our marriage is the true one, that is why I shall show in the world occasionally with an unbended crest, because people must understand there is no wrong, no sin between you and me, nor ever was. And you must tell the Princess everything."

"Have I not?"

"Ah, more. Everything. Promise me this that you will before you are married. It is the last thing I ask of you."

"I promise. When this woman shall have brought me a son—"

"Oh, you must have been mad to threaten her in that way; why, in doing so you risked all your chances of happiness."

"I was mad. Mad with the torture beyond my strength, but I meant it every word, and do so still. If you leave me now, as soon as I can I will leave her, abandon 'living in sin,' as I presume you would term it. You will take me back then, after a while?"

"Never. My religion—"

"I thought you said you were never going to let that cursed, abominable religion come between us again."

"I said I would never ask a third person—any person's advice concerning our affairs or your—your peccadilloes. But this is different, I have received my orders from Rome itself, and as for living in sin—I do not know, somehow it seems to bind me and not you, anomalous as it may sound,

for you were married by a clergyman of your own Church, but still that Church does not recognise the marriage, whilst my Church does acknowledge it, without approving. Try not to think of that any more. I fear I should never get permission. Oh, my dearest, if you love me, do not talk of it!"

They stood still, on the muddy, oozy bank, listening to the faint, dreary wash.

He held her hands tightly. "You are here now, but you will be so soon gone, and I shall have only the echo of your voice ringing in my brain, only a wavering memory of your sweetness."

"I have lingered already too long; release my hands, let me finish. Here is a package, in it you will find everything, every letter you have ever written me, the certificate and the will you wrote the first week we were married. All the plate and jewels I have sent to Carlton House. Oh, I had so much to say to you, I knew what her answer would be, and night after night for a month past have I lain awake and thought of things, and now I can remember nothing save the sweet love that lies between us, so newly slain that the blood has hardly ceased to gush."

"Heart's love, this is not good-bye! It cannot be good-bye. It is so early, oh, stay a while."

"I must go now—at once."

"Let me walk back with you. I too have so much to say. Give me time to accustom myself to this a few days, a few hours even, until to-morrow, my wife. Don't leave me here like this, let me rest in my own home one night more."

"No, no, you must not come, you must not be seen with me, you must not pass my door, it would ruin all. Oh, my dear, my dear—let us part here, where we first met, and let us part quickly, so that you retain a pleasant memory of me for your last to think on, if ever you do; not one as blistered, ugly, disfigured—it is my woman's vanity.

"I think I would sooner have it so; it would make you seem more human, less virginal, less cold. Don't go yet, don't steal my few poor moments from me. You are such a miser, dear, of yourself, you grant me such a little and so grudgingly. Your love was ever different from mine."

"Yet I shall remember when you have long forgotten. Nay"—as he would have spoken—"it should be so. You have your life before you, dear, and you must try and think of me only as an incident, just one page. Mark it with fair flowers, if you will, before you turn it, but do not look back for long years; and then, if you think to do so, there will but be a faint, sweet odour to last a brief while, and conjure up, it may be, one pleasant memory. George, let me go now. Beloved, our joy was quick to die."

"Good-bye, good-bye. Oh, my soul, this is worse than death. I cannot say good-bye now—do not ask it, it is too soon. Much is permitted a man condemned on the eve of paying the penalty. And I must see you again, dear heart, before I suffer for my unfaithfulness. It will be something to live for till then, something to strengthen me. I may come?"

"I cannot say no, I must not say yes."

"I will come! I must come!"

"George! George!"

"Molly, my Molly!"

And in the cold winter twilight, on that dismal, lonely spot, they kissed and clung and parted, only to return in wild, wretched, unsatisfied pain to repeat the tender, unreasonable, passionate farewell, to call down innumerable blessings and insanely reiterate those foolish, pitiful human words with hot, burning tears and miserable, quivering kisses.

He tangled great handfuls of her hair, which had come unbound, in his hand and cooled his hot, wretched face in it, fragrant and damp with the mist. He parted her soft cambric kerchief and kissed the white neck once reverently, gently, chivalrously, and that was just at the last.

Then she fled, with unseeing eyes and scared face, to the house to which nine years before he had led her a bride. And he cast himself, unheeding, on the chill, damp ground, burying his face in his folded arms on just such another boulder as he had first seen her sitting on, with petulant, lonely sobs.

The dull, dreary drip, drip from the grey trees was the only sound as the night came down like a black pall, save once when a water rat, which had been disporting himself on the river bank, disappeared with a tiny splash. And the pallid ghostly river sang a hushed requiem.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRINCESS CAROLINE OF BRUNSWICK

"Ah, she will bring a sound of pattering feet!"

On the 30th of December 1794 the King announced to Parliament the happy event of a conclusion of a treaty of marriage between the Prince of Wales and the Princess Caroline, daughter of the Duke of Brunswick.

And after this initial movement there was a weary wait for all parties of over three months whilst Lord Malmesbury, formerly Sir James Harris, was bringing over the bride. War was raging in Holland, and this chiefly delayed them, for it was feared there were hostile fleets of the French hovering around Stade, where she must embark.

The Princess, who was accompanied by her mother, the Duchess, came to a full stop at Osnabrück, where she was tumultuously received, whilst they waited for further instructions, or rather advices, as to how matters were at sea. During this dull time Lord Malmesbury, if we may go by his diary, thoroughly weighed and dissected the Princess in his mind, and his conclusions were not at all complimentary to her, and she in turn amused herself in shocking him and playing practical jokes.

At Osnabrück they missed the Duke of York by but a few days. Of course, he knew they were coming, but having had no official information to that effect, he was glad to avail himself of the opportunity to escape the meeting. There was no love lost, he, indeed, some time before, having practically refused the hand of the Princess himself.

He had been in command of the troops in Holland since January '93, and a most disastrous campaign it had proved to be, save for his one brilliant victory at Valenciennes.

Now he came home disgusted from a trial for which he had lacked experience more than strength, and only to find the country from end to end preparing to give a right royal reception to the woman who was the most obnoxious one to himself and the Duchess that could possibly have been chosen.

There had been a strained feeling between himself and his eldest brother for some little time before he left England, dating, in fact, from shortly after his own marriage. It started with the women. He had ever been Maria's favourite, and they had always been the best of friends, but the Duchess did not approve of her and declined to treat her as an equal, as a sister-in-law, and as George was then very touchy on that point, this was the real cause of the temporary coolness.

However, he went to see her the day after his return. She was at Richmond and did not expect him—indeed, she denied herself to all visitors. He found her in the garden picking a bunch of the first snowdrops. He was bronzed and healthier-looking, his walk was more imperious, his frame more sinewy. Despite the hardships of the campaign, he seemed stouter.

"Molly!" he cried, "Molly!"

The few white flowers fluttered to her feet; she gave a frightened cry, for the moment the likeness to his elder brother was so vivid; then she recognised him and gave him both her hands. He took them and kissed them, and then he drew her nearer and kissed her on each cheek. "My poor, poor girl!" he said pitifully, "my dear old friend!"

"Have you heard it all, then? I knew you were expected, but I had not heard of your arrival."

"I landed but yesterday. I have heard inaccurate, incoherent particulars."

"Have you seen him? How did he seem? What did he say?"

"He said nothing about it. I was with him but a short time and then we spoke chiefly of my adventures."

"Ah, yes. I have followed your progress the whole time with the deepest possible interest."

"The progress! The *retreat!*" he returned bitterly.

"Ah, but what a retreat, over that awful, hostile country, with such a force to harass you."

"Well, never let's talk of it, dear. Tell me all about your trouble."

And so she told him everything as far as she knew, or could at all understand, as they walked up and down, arm in arm, in the weak winter sunshine.

"But of the latest news I know nothing," she said, "so I look to you. All that I hear I read in the newspapers and that, of course, is old. My wavering friends, those I made since I married your brother, regard me as a cast-off favourite and are discreetly silent till they see what my position is to be, my own relations and old acquaintances only write to abuse me for the disgrace they say I have brought on them."

"But this will never do!" he exclaimed.

"But it is so. The only person that has ever been near me all this time has been the Duchess of Devonshire. Oh, yes, Mrs Jordan came once or twice to try and cheer me up and would not be sent away."

"She is no fit associate for you," he said prudishly, with a man's conservatism and innate horror of the mixing of the "clean" and the "unclean."

"She means to be kind and she is very good-natured. Besides we are in the same boat—she and I."

"Nonsense! you must not talk in that strain. Hush, dear, hush!"

"Well, and is it not the truth or very near it? But you know more of the Princess, you have seen her. Tell me—"

"She is very good-natured and good-humoured," he said, trying to speak from the most hopeful point of view, "and I think she is generous."

"Would you call her pretty?"

"No. Her limbs are shapely, but she is clumsily put together. What I remember of her is that she was very untidy and indifferent in her dress; she swore like a man and she was lively up to boisterousness."

"Worse and worse. He sets such an inordinate value on little things, he is so particular on trivial points."

"Try and look at it from the brightest side, *Kindchen*. They won't see so much of each other, let us hope. If Harris—Malmesbury, I mean, does his duty properly, all this long while they are coming over, she ought to be very much subdued. He will school her to be guarded in what she says and does. They are not going to retire to the depth of the country to dissect each other, you know!"

"You dear boy! what a comfort you are, how kind! how good! Oh, I want him to be happy, *Friedrich*. The only thing left me is to pray for his happiness."

"You patient, loving woman. He was always miles too good for you; I wish you had married me—not that I am any better, only you would not in that case be worried with a business like this. George would anyhow, debt or no debt, Jersey or no Jersey, have had in the end to have married, lass. It was inevitable. You see he is the heir and a *mariage de convenance* is the curse that goes with it, the bitter drop—a man cannot expect everything in this world and pay no price for it. You will—you must forgive him; the dear old fellow is helpless. You will take him back in the end?"

"Never! How could I? I am his wife, and have been ten years, and for ten years he has looked on me, he has respected me as his honest wife. If cruel men make laws so that he, by a legal quibble, is free, so that they may sell him, like a slave, for their own benefit, it does not take one jot from my honesty or— Oh, you must see it, I could never take him back—never, never."

"Never is a long day, Molly."

"It is my irrevocable decision," said she, firmly. "He told me when I last saw him that—that it was not good-bye then, that he would come again before the marriage, and I would so much rather he did not. Will you try and persuade him in this, whenever he speaks of me to you? If he is thinking about me all the time, he will not give her proper attention."

"I will do what I can. And if what you say is really your absolute final decision I think you are very, very brave and wise. There is nothing so painful as partings."

"I could not stand another scene like the last. It does no good, that sort of thing."

"I will remember that you do not wish to see him again," he said.

She let that pass unheeded.

"I may come now and again?"

"You are the only real friend I seem to have in the world, *Friedrich*. You do not find fault with me and in your pity there is no sting."

Before he went, he asked her one question. "Do you want any money—what has he allowed you? It is to be paid the same, I suppose?"

"He never allowed me anything fixed. He gave me a sum of money at odd intervals when he could spare it I have enough of my own, thank you.'

"Nonsense!" he returned, "this must be seen into, I will make it my business. Good-bye, dear."

This kind friend came two or three times afterwards and brought all the information she had, save what came by the slangy, high-spirited Dora Jordan, whose visits increased as the spring broke. "I know you don't want me," she said one day, swinging carelessly, half in, half out, upon her seat on the open window-sill, "and I have had positive orders from 'Sweet William' to stay away. But you want someone to rouse you out of yourself. It is as good for you as brimstone and treacle is good for children. How long are you going to stay in this damned dreary dulness?"

"I shall not leave here until—"

"After the marriage? Good Lord! this place would drive me to drink in a week. Nothing but sky and trees and other horrors. Give me town or 'dear, dhirty Dooblin.' Why, in a place like this one would be reduced to the extremity of thinking and reviewing the enormities of one's past life, and women like you and I, my dear, ought not to think of past or future—it brings wrinkles. Pardie! if you are here much longer you will develop into a Bible-woman, and march round praying over starving people and poking your nose in where you are not wanted and prying into other people's business. That's only one step from trying to convert me. If you take that on, it will find you

employment for the rest of your life, and at the end of it you will be where you started, I'm thinking."

"Don't have any fear of that," said Maria, with a faint smile.

"Fear! I am afraid of no one. There was one old woman once came to me—" She plunged into a long tale of how a would-be rescuer of her sinful self was unceremoniously routed by the wit of her tongue.

She would hang on persistently—inviting herself to the simple meals. She would order Maria's maid—"Get your mistress's habit laid out and send an order to the stable for her horse to be brought round with mine, at three o'clock we are going riding together," and Maria, for peace, for the look of the thing, had to go. And underneath her incessant rattle there was considerable shrewdness and a wonderful tact.

She would bring work with her she professed most urgent, and enlist the other's aid, declaring herself unable to hold a needle. She was learning the principal part in an opera, and was always wanting advice and her accompaniments played.

"It's as well to know it," she said cheerfully, "for if he gives me the go-by and I have to work again, I shall have less time to study it than now, sha'n't I? Quicker. La, la, la, de. That's it."

Ofttimes she brought the boy, and once drove gaily away and forgot all about him till Maria arrived at her house, half an hour after she reached it, bringing him safe. No whit was she concerned. "Left him, did I? Well, he was in good hands. Perhaps you would like to keep him a day or two to amuse yourself with."

As the time of the Princess's arrival drew near, she offered casually to come and stay, but on Maria's refusing she made no further allusion to the proposal.

On the 27th of March she came flying down with the news—"They sail to-morrow and she will be here by Wednesday."

"So soon!" breathed Maria.

"And what do you think? Oh, it's lovely. You know Mrs Harcourt met her at Hanover, and as she's coming over

in this roundabout way on account of the war, all the rest of them, instead of going over in the *Juno* to meet her at Stade, are to be at Greenwich. But that's not good enough for Grandmamma Jersey, she marches aboard the yacht, bold as brass, and Jack Payne—he's in command—ordered her ashore, and back she had to come, and she's up in town now and swears she won't go back a second time."

"What has Lady Jersey to do with it?" asked Maria in a frightened voice.

"Haven't you heard? She's appointed one of her ladies, but then he wouldn't tell you, naturally."

"I haven't seen him since November," she said.

"Haven't you seen him since November!" repeated Mrs Jordan, forgetting Lady Jersey in her astonishment. "Impossible! I thought you were very clever in keeping his visits so quiet and that very likely he couldn't come often, not wanting people to know, as he is supposed to be a 'virtuous Joseph' now. And I wondered why you were here, for I thought it would make it more difficult. Have you broken it off altogether, then?"

"Altogether."

"What a funny sort of woman you are and how strangely you take things. If he belonged to me, do you think I'd kick him out in that way, just because the poor man has to get married?—isn't that punishment enough? If you weren't a fool you would see your best days are coming now, for his pockets will be full, and you can have a damn jolly time."

"Yes, but," returned Maria, sitting with tightly-shut lips bolt upright in her chair, "but what of her? She comes to a strange country to a man she has never seen, and by her coming she relieves him as I with my love have not, could not do—I mean from the burden and awful humiliation of debt."

"It strikes me," interrupted Mrs Jordan, "you feel those same debts a damnation sight more than he does."

"Well, she does this, and, according to her religion and country, and alas! alas! his religion too, she honestly marries him—by-and-by she will bring him a son. It is not for me to interfere, my day is done."

"Rubbish! think of her, indeed! Why, in all probability

she leaves a lover in Germany who will follow her over by the first convenient boat."

"What a horrible idea!"

Mrs Jordan laughed. "My dear, I know life. Oh, look at this, my 'good man' brought it home last night."

It was a window picture such as could be bought anywhere for a penny, and it represented the Prince stretched on a white bed, sleeping the quiet sleep of the just and smiling in that sleep, for his dream, shown above balanced on substantial white clouds, was of the fair bride as an elevating angel, whilst all his black, evil influences and wicked geniuses rolled malignantly, muttering, yet harmless, away. Their faces were those of Sheridan, Fox, Hanger, and others of that ilk.

"The man who drew it forgot me," said Maria, with a pitiful, quaint little smile, then, with a sudden burst of emotion, she threw herself into the arms of Mrs Jordan. "And he is my husband," she sobbed. "He is not hers or anyone else's—at least in the sight of God he must surely be all my own!"

"You are not a bit practical, in fact an awful idiot," softening the severity of her words with a warm squeeze. "Yet somehow I can't help liking you. But you are a silly, silly goose not to see that as long as it isn't you it will be Jersey, and she's such a greedy, selfish cat, she won't care a hang for him and only work him for her own interest, and presently, if you don't look after him, it's quite on the cards he will pick up with some bright beauty a lively lot worse than she."

"Do you think I have thought of none of these things?"

"You may be a nice-looking woman, and I should admire you anyhow, being dark myself; you may have money and you may have been a widow, but there's one thing as certain as chickens come out of eggs, you don't understand men. As long as you run after them, they run away—"

"I don't run after him," said Maria, indignantly.

"As long as you are prepared to play door-mat they will dance on you, and Griselda is not a nice *rôle* at all, to my thinking. I've lived with a man I've been in love with, and I had a hell of a time, and now I'm living with a man who'

in love with me. Lord sakes! the dissimilarity. I can twist him round my little finger. Children will keep a man some time, as I said the first day I saw you, and indifference next. Let a man think you don't care a tinker's cuss whether he goes or stays, and he will stay through perverseness. Sweetness and docility will never keep them. I don't know much of that fine gentleman of yours, but I can see enough to know that you would never have a lasting hold. You are too fond of him. He needs the delicate handling of perfect indifference to keep him true. A woman loses her head if she loves a man, and can never manage him; when she does not care, the fineness of her perception and touch gets unaccountably blunted."

"He is fonder of me than ever," Maria defended.

"I was not asserting otherwise," said Mrs Jordan, placidly. "I was talking of keeping him, I think."

But although the Princess was expected, and in due order ought to have arrived on the Wednesday, it was Sunday the 5th when she really at last did set foot on British soil. By Wednesday morning they were off Yarmouth, and then a thick, melancholy fog surrounded them, just as they sighted the white English cliffs, and so dense was this, it kept them stationary over forty-eight hours. On Saturday they anchored at Gravesend, early on Sunday morning the party was transferred to a small yacht and sailed for Greenwich, arriving there at twelve o'clock.

By this time her arrival was definitely known, and vast crowds flocked to the river banks, their numbers increasing every hour.

Her Serene Highness made no secret whatever of her delight that the long journey, and especially Lord Malmesbury's tutelage, was drawing near its end. She took the greatest interest in the shipping and the river, asking the sailors all manners of questions and flirting with the officers in a way that scandalised Lord Malmesbury. He was mightily vexed; modest tears and gentle prayers was the *rôle* he would have willingly enforced on her.

Greenwich at last, and yet another delay. The crowd was there cheering. The detachment of the Tenth Hussars,

under Lord Edward Somerset, was there. The Governor of the Hospital was there also with his subordinates. Sir William Herschel, the Astronomer Royal, attended, and a detachment of convalescent sailors was drawn up to greet her when she landed, by which time she was worked up to such a pitch that she was as diffident and nervous as Lord Malmesbury could possibly wish, all the "bounce" was out of her. She looked very well in a white gown over a blue satin petticoat, and a black beaver hat of the kind now called "picture" with big blue and black plumes. But there was no bridegroom to encourage and welcome her, such as Lord Malmesbury had understood and led her to believe there would be, nor was there any vehicle to take them to town. There was a delay of over an hour at the Governor's before two barouches, each drawn by six greys, arrived. In the first one, haughty and insolent, sat Lady Jersey, and alone. The reason of the tardiness of their coming was that at the hour they should have started Lady Jersey was not ready.

Lord Malmesbury presented her Ladyship to the Princess; he was greatly put out. "Let us start at once," he said, fuming.

"Oh, no," objected the lady-in-waiting. "Oh, dear, no. The Princess cannot travel in those clothes, my Lord. You have done your best," patronisingly, "but you do not understand."

"You keep the Princess, the betrothed of your master and mine, waiting, Madam," he objected grimly, "and you strangely forget your place."

"Your insolent audacity, my Lord, will be your ruin yet, unless I am charitable enough to regard it as ignorance and take no heed. I am here on the authority of the Prince, understand, and I will be obeyed. Come, your Highness." She bustled the Princess, who had not understood a word of the rapid English, from the room, and in another chamber inducted her into a white satin robe and green turban she had brought with her and deemed suitable.

"If ever I let a wife, mother, sister, mistress, or any other woman interfere in my affairs," thought Lord Malmesbury, looking after them, "may I be damned eternally."

And this was the manner of the Princess's entry into England.

CHAPTER XXV

GOOD-BYE!

"We have slept together in the moonbeams!
And I have grown so close to him, my very flesh doth tear!"

THE spring night waned slowly. It had been such a night as fairies choose to dance intricate steps in the spaces of silver moonlight that the jealous trees have not stolen. And now it paled to the eerie, witch light of dawn, and it seemed as though the earth, all drowned in its tears of dew, was for a while clad in colourless mourning, in penance for all the wicked sons it had borne. Yet the faint outline of the opening green buds, innocent as a virgin breast, showed tenderly and full of promise.

A cock crowed and was answered by another, and then a third in the far distance, till the battle cry was taken up for miles, and then died into silence again.

A little baby wind came wandering along, caressing unheedingly the fruitful branches and then it lost its way in through the open window of the room where Maria knelt, keeping watch, and kissed her forehead timidly. It was a very young, early spring wind, its lips were cold, and at their touch she shivered.

The night long had she kept this vigil and now it was grey, dreary dawn.

"Tell him not to come," she had said to the Duke of York, and now she trembled fearing he would obey. Already it was the morning of Wednesday, the wedding-day, and the marriage would take place in fifteen hours at the outside. There was a clock in the corner that ticked horribly, she longed for it to cease, and although its persistence maddened her, she felt powerless to stop it. Quarter

after quarter it chimed with monotonous iteration, and she felt the moments slipping away from her, as one standing on the edge of a precipice does the crumbling earth under foot.

"He will come, he must come!" she had repeated again and again during the long, weary hours she had waited in the great temple of night's silence. "And yet," as past admonitions came back, she said, "I ought to pray that he may not. Oh, God! if it is a sin, then keep him from me, but it cannot be that for one meagre half-hour: to-day she gains him always, surely I can have that and yet not rob her. Forgive me, forgive me, if I am a rebellious, unsubmissive woman in asking this!" And with sobbings, prayers and entreaty of this kind she mourned the night through.

And now a great change came over the landscape. The trees ceased moving and everything listened breathlessly, for Nature, if man does not, takes the most ardent interest in the supreme daily miracle.

Foremost, in due order, came the little fairy heralds and clad in yellow and pink, timidly at first, and then with greater confidence, proclaiming the advance of the omnipotent majesty; they were followed by others, bolder, sturdier, and these were dressed in gold, and at the sight of them all, the birds burst into a loud triumphant, harmonious welcome, and the river, that had crept in frightened silence all night, began to hearten up and steal jewels from the coming victor to deck herself for his approval, and then the clouds parted, like the curtains of a tent, and his imperial majesty, the sun, came haughtily from his slumbers, clad in robes of royal crimson, and all the world passed in that instant from wavering uncertainty to confirmed, assured day. As the sun appeared in sight, the lark detached itself from the melodious confusion of the united chorus, and came to try and gain his commendation in a heart-sung anthem, for even as the nightingale is the courtier, servant, slave and un-asking lover of the Lady Moon, so does the lark worship from afar and humbly endeavour to please her lord, the Sun.

But the glamour soon goes. The sun is scarcely up when

everything of a sudden is commonplace, the fustian work-a-day world again. The birds soon cease from singing and go about their tasks of nest-building, or digging up big, fat, wriggling worms, and the kine, calling loudly to be milked, makes one think of breakfast and the day, whose course has just started to run, and all the tasks that must be executed during its flying hours. And so, on this occasion, in common with the rest, folks began to stir, and the clank of a stable pail could be heard from Maria's window and the energetic hustle, bustle, of the poultry-yard. There were not so very many distractions, for Richmond was right in the country then, remember, and a poor place as regards size in itself, but presently a heavy barge came in sight, being towed slowly up-stream by a stout cart horse, led by a stolid-looking yokel. A pretty young woman with a red handkerchief over her head, tossing a crowing baby was its only visible occupant. Maria watched the trio indifferently and then bit her lip at the white favour on the fellow's whip. Presently they passed out of sight and there was silence again, save for the inevitable country sounds.

The gay young sunbeams danced over everything on innumerable expeditions into little green nooks, discovering tender leaves that half coyly would have hid, inquiring into the dimples of the river, which rippled with laughter at their audacities, and repulsed them with encouragement; but still they gilded everything with a bright, fictitious beauty; they came boldly into Maria's room, unappropriately brightening it, and bringing something of the joy of the promising life without, heeding not that the morning was growing duller and the clouds in the south-west were beginning to mass together.

Very early there came a knock at the door, but she would admit no one, and after she had twice denied access there came the rattle of china, a single tap, and then the sound of retreating footsteps.

Cold, stiff and cramped, she stumbled to her feet and opened it. Outside there was a prettily-laid tray with nicely-rolled bread and butter and some hot, strong, invigorating tea. She took it in and, pouring it out, drank feverishly

and then hurried back to the window. A cry broke from her, for the road winding in the distance was obscured by a cloud of dust. She drew back into the shadow of the curtain and watched. The cloud drew nearer and became distinguishable as a single horseman, and as he mounted the hill she recognised the Duke of York.

Now the land her house was built on was one long strip and extremely narrow, and her window was but sixty feet from the piece of waste ground next to her garden.

When she saw who it was, she leant slightly forward, and catching sight of her, he doffed and waved his hat. Without attempting to dismount, he rode near the window outside the hedge and there drew rein.

"I have come to warn you," he shouted. "I had but five minutes' start and I have galloped all the way. George is coming."

She raised her head. Far down the road a second cloud of dust was now visible.

"Nothing I could say, or do, would keep him. He has no one with him who is dangerous, thank goodness, only Moira. You see if the thing gets about, Blowsabella will have another handle given her."

And now she knew he was coming, she made one last effort to say him nay. "He must not come," said Ghostly Orders; "he must not come," said Pride, and pale, weeping Love only sighed imploringly.

"Ride back and meet him, tell him I will not see him, that all the doors are locked—that—"

He nodded an interruption and, wheeling round, galloped to join the three advancing horsemen. Again she drew back and stupidly, but half comprehending, watched the animated controversy that waged a while as though it had been a stage scene or the gesticulating figures the merest strangers. For at least five minutes the argument waxed, and then the Duke of York walked his horse slowly off down the hill followed by two of the newer arrivals, and the one manly, unmistakable figure advanced towards the house.

Like his brother, he disdained the prosaic entrance of a gate, and, jumping the hedge, cantered instinctively to

beneath the open window, his horse's hoofs making the soft clods of the green lawn fly and trampling ruthlessly on the early spring flowers in the beds.

"York has given me your message!" he cried, turning eager eyes to the blank, dark square above. "I cannot see you, but I know you can hear me. I must speak to you"—in a masterful, peremptory tone. "If you don't come down, I will shoot the lock from your door, or with a hatchet break the shutters in.

She came into his view then, haggard and wan, her white face accentuated by the loose, falling robe of sombre black. "You ought not to be here," she said hoarsely. "You must not be here."

He started in pity as he looked at her. "By the *Heiligsten!* you have suffered as well as I," he exclaimed. "I am weak as a rat and spent with exhaustion. I have not slept for a week. Let me rest here a while in charity—there's nowhere else for me to go."

She shook her head. "Can you not ride to Kew?" she asked.

"Moll! Moll, heart's dearest, you cannot refuse me this last time. Come down, I promise not to offend you. I will not touch you, if you do not wish it, nor attempt to enter the house. *Liebste*, only come into the garden, when I can talk with you without everyone who cares to listen being able to hear."

She wavered visibly. "If I come, you must wait," she said. "I am not dressed, my hair is all disarranged, I must properly attire myself."

He raised his eyebrows. "What needless formality."

"Formality reigns between us now, George," she answered sadly.

"You must not be more than five minutes, then."

She was less than five minutes. She but plunged her burning face into some soft, cool rainwater and brushed and gathered into a loose, hasty knot her tumbled, straying hair. Her trembling fingers had but half completed their task when his voice again came from outside and she ran to the window.

"Are you never coming?" he queried fretfully, flicking

his hunting-crop till the chestnut horse pranced like a ballet dancer.

"Go round to the back of the house," she said; "it will be more private."

She met him on the little terrace which, years before, he had likened to Juliet's balcony. "I will see you from here," she said. There was an almond tree just blossoming, with its first rosy blushes fading to lily white, as the flowers opened. Accidentally he jarred this, as he rode as close as possible, and the falling petals showered over him with a faint, intoxicating odour. She remained standing inside the doorway some five feet away.

For all his impatience he was silent now. It was some time before he spoke. "She has arrived," he said at last, curtly. "She is coarse, florid and vulgar, a forward, pettish, ill-humoured hussy. But I suppose you have heard everything."

"I have heard that you did not go to meet her and that Lady Jersey has been appointed lady-in-waiting — dear, that is not a good beginning."

He stared in front of him. "What does it matter?" he asked. "Besides, it was the Queen's doing more than mine. Jersey wished it and it will keep her quiet."

"If she is angry and hurt, no wonder. You are not giving her a fair chance."

He moved his shoulders impatiently. "I do not want to talk of her," he said, turning his head and craning it towards her, "only of you, my dear, my dear. Come and kiss me, Molly—it is a century since you kissed me, and I feel so tired and sick and weary of everything." There were tears in his eyes as she complied, weak, miserable tears of self-pity, a craven sight in a man who should have been strong and self-reliant.

She clasped her arms about him and did her tender best to soothe and encourage and hearten him up, though with ill success.

"I think there is a curse on me," he moaned. "What have I done to deserve to be punished for it in this way, and be made to marry this odious, loud creature? She grates on my nerves more than I can find words to express,

and you know how that sort of thing upsets me. And she called me *fat*," he concluded, with a petulant, childish sigh. "I am not fat, am I?"

"My dearest, I do not think so."

"Would anyone else, then?" he cried.

"I cannot see why they should," she answered. "I wish that she had not said it, though, to annoy you."

"Oh, she was punished," he declared with a little animation. "I told her before everyone what a pity it was that her feet were so large."

Maria kept her arms about him and let him kiss her again and again unchecked. Oh, was she right to banish him—so childish, nay babyish, so intensely lovable for his very weaknesses? Would he not sink utterly and be even worse than he was ten years before? He was older now, but alas! no wiser. It made her sick to think of him jibed at, worried, laughed at with hurt vanity and wounded self-love, his opinions ridiculed, his wishes ignored, when she had studied him in every tiny detail.

She felt torn in two. Strangely then her thoughts wandered to the Princess. Of course, he must come before all, but she could not help remembering how, time after time, she had told herself how unfair it would be not to give her a chance. She took but little notice of his expressions of disgust—for he was in so biassed a mood, he would have considered Helen plain, and the prejudice would die away—or Caroline's impertinences. Probably she was a high-spirited girl, though it certainly was a bad beginning. Still, by-and-by when the heir came—unknowingly she clasped him closer—they might come more together in mutual respect, if not in love, and surely it was to be desired most of all, for the good of himself and the good of the country.

She kissed his forehead and then laid her cheek against his with a little soothing, rocking motion. "Try and meet her half-way, beloved," she suggested, "and do not judge too hastily. Remember she is young and inexperienced. When she offends you, try and think it is only ignorance."

"If only we'd cut it all and gone to the American

Colonies ten years ago, we should not have to part now, *meine Frau.*"

"Oh, don't, don't! My dear one, if you would but set yourself the task of realising even dimly something of your responsibilities, of the great and awful trust the Almighty God has laid on your shoulders, and which you assume when the King your father dies. If only you were less of a butterfly and would think yourself as one apart—dedicated."

"I thought myself dedicated to you, *Mariechen.* I do think so still."

"George dear, from to-day I am to you but the past. You told her about me as you promised you would?"

"Last night," he said.

"That is right. And there is one favour that I have no right now to ask you anything, most earnestly nevertheless do entreat."

"*Was ist das?*"

"Get rid of Lady Jersey at once. Don't mind what it costs, or what people say. You have no chance of happiness with her about you—even now she is poisoning the Princess's mind. She is a wicked, unprincipled woman, George; she does not love you, she is only trying to advance her own interests and gain a sort of infamous fame from the connection, such as some women like."

"Your slightest wish is my inviolable law, you know that."

"Ah, what a relief that is to me. I have seen through her so long."

And for a while they talked love like a pair newly betrothed.

"It is five months since I saw you," he said, "and all hope was shattered that dead winter day. I remember its grey misery well, how its hopelessness accorded with our own bitter sorrow."

"But now it is the spring, the spring of your promise, dear," she said, trying hard to smile cheerfully. "Make up your mind, this over, all will be really well with you."

"You know what I said then, what I wrote to her. I repeat it now."

"No, no, you shall not."

"The time will come and you will take me back," he

persisted doggedly. "I have been foolish! I have been wicked. I am paying for my foolishness—for my sins—now. A year or two—the time will come, and the hope sustains me." He set his lips and looked at her defiantly, and as steadily she returned his gaze, till his eyes dropped.

"No, dear, no, no; it never can be that—ah, that it could. See here, George, once and for all you must put that thought away, every thought of me away, I shall never change. It must be good-bye for ever now, not good-bye for a while. Our marriage has been a fiasco in every way. You love me now, I know, but, allowing that, you may yet be happier with her than ever with me. You must try and understand it is good-bye for ever, dear, that at your marriage a new leaf is finally turned over. I have had my use, dearest, I pride myself. I pulled you back from your letting yourself, in your good nature, become too much the dupe of the adventurers that surrounded you. She will complete the good work. Of your own rank, she can walk with you higher than ever I have done, or ever could do. You must forget all about me, dear, save as a true friend who will always love you and always pray for you—as a friend. Why, my vanity should be more than flattered that you did not sicken long ago. Remember my age and she is young and sweet. You will think of me kindly, dear, dear love, as the years go on; you will give a passing thought and half a smile and half a sigh to those first days that you and I were here together. You will—"

He buried his face in her shoulder and his whole body shook with stormy sobs. "I love only you, Maria," he said after a while. "I want only you. The first, the last—oh, my soul—the only one. Long, long ago, dear. Now. Always. There is no one in all the world but you."

Presently he raised fully to her view a stormy, disfigured face. "Your eyes are dry, *Kindchen*, you love me, I know, but you feel less intensely than I."

"I have wept all my tears, I think, during the long hours of our separation," she said.

"What are you going to do this next day or so? You should not be alone."

"I shall stay here, and I don't think I could stand any-

one about me I would rather be here, where I first met you. I want to say good-bye to it all. Strange, I never thought that an old coat of yours, a glove and a riding-whip would be the most precious possessions I could have, yet so it is."

His horse started, and roused them. A drizzly rain began to fall. "You must go!" she said.

"Heart's dearest, I have been a fool, a knave, but I should like to know you forgive me?"

"I forgave everything long ago."

"I love you as I never loved you before," he said, "and yet from my love there seems arising only a great peace."

"And so do I love you," she said.

They kissed solemnly.

"I did not want to see you, and now how glad I am that I came down. For it is good to have had you a little while, sweetheart, before you become hers, not mine."

"I go from your sweet arms as a man that has partaken of a sacrament and is refreshed."

"You said you were sick and weary when you came."

"That is gone for a while—your kisses have charmed it all away. I am going to be brave and resolute, and worthy of your love and belief in me."

"And you will give the Princess justice?"

"I will meet her, as you asked me to, half-way."

"And you will send Lady Jersey away?"

"I have promised," he said.

She bent the closest scrutiny on his face, as though trying to print every feature on her mind, to impress it there for ever. Then he hooked his reins on to a nail in the balcony woodwork and, standing up in the stirrups, took her into his arms. "Good-bye," he said brokenly, "my own sweet wife, the fondest, faithfullest woman man was ever blessed with the love of. God guard and keep you."

But she said nothing, only she clung to him mutely, and at his last words bowed her head.

Then suddenly the joy-bells rang out: peal after peal in a mad fairy race with each other. From churches near, from churches far, the merry notes answered each other, till the whole country at one burst seemed to give tongue

to its happiness save this one lonely woman standing there, motionless, and—*alone!*

She opened her eyes, and took a long, stammering breath. He was *gone.* Somehow she had not seemed to see him go. She came to herself with a rush, and raced madly into the house and up the stairs to the window at which she had kept her night-long vigil. The horsemen were still in sight, but she could not distinguish which was he as she hung from the window, with the music of the wedding-bells clashing in her ears and afar off the dull booming of the minute guns.

At last the little group stopped, and her straining eyes could see one hat waved aloft high in the air.

Then the man continued the mad gallop to London and his waiting bride.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE NATION REJOICES

"They shall be married before all men!"

THE remarkably well-sounding good resolutions, to be "brave, and resigned, and worthy of your love," were however, I am sorry to say, of very short duration.

Oh, he did mean it when he said it, and he told himself all the way up to town how kind and forbearing and considerate he was going to be. He was really very miserable, resenting his self-made trouble as an undeserved misfortune, a sort of spite of Fate, and his opinion of the matter was that he was an ill-used martyr, most cruelly overpunished for a minor fault.

Arriving in town, he changed from his dusty riding dress into one more becoming a happy lover, and in the full heat of ardour to put into practice his good intentions, he proceeded to pay his devoirs at the shrine of the Princess. Superstitious people will see something very ominous in this alone. That the bridegroom should not behold the bride on the wedding-day until they meet at the altar is a universal belief.

He found her, most unfortunately, querulous, and her ladies, whose posts had been no sinecures that morning, hailed his arrival with secret delight.

She was dull, bored and home-sick, and her emotional nature, to save itself the ignominy of tears, found vent in senseless mischief and foolish teasing. "Hopelessly underbred," says Lord Malmesbury, cuttingly, in his diary kept during their long journey. "Filled with a delight she could ill conceal at the brilliant prospect before her." This is unkind and surely unnecessarily strong. To question the

criticism of a personal observer at the first glance seems absurd, but it is plain to all how hopelessly biassed he was against the unfortunate woman. From contemporary literature, from a host of miscellaneous letters, from portraits, papers, and from modern writings, we learn she was thoroughly good-hearted, filled with merry *bonhomie*, cheerful good-will and animal exuberance; she was what we should now describe as a "jolly girl." We cannot judge her from the stiff, formal letters that have come down to us, probably very much "edited" before they reached their first destination and long before they were given to the world—and, perhaps, dictated altogether—rather from her jokes, which do not always seem to have been delicate, and her general behaviour. As to her looks, she was well-built, of the breezy, milkmaid type, with fine limbs, and a free, bold carriage; she had a sensitive skin of Saxon fairness and the commonplace blue eyes and blonde hair that accompanies it; she had the eyelids of a flirt, a shrewd nose, and a chin that denoted a love of ease and pleasure and a general disinclination to worry. In short, a more impossible wife for George, Prince of Wales, could not have been found. The boisterous good-homour with which she greeted him was enough to set his irritable nerves a-jingling, never did the dainty grace and super-refined elegances of the eighteenth century show to greater disadvantage on anyone than on her whose magnificent healthiness might have made her a beauty in a farmyard.

But it was all there, nevertheless, the fan-flirting, the fragile lace, the delicate sandal.

And he was the very personification of little refinements, of exquisite dress, elaborate manner, a profound student of all the petty details that went to the equipment of the perfect macaroni, an epicure, if he was also a voluptuary, for whose adornment the fine dressing of the day might have been invented, so well did it become him, who goes down to posterity as the acme of refined taste and perfect breeding.

She bombarded him with such a host of questions in very bad English such as would not have disgraced in quantity her Royal uncle's reputation and, fortunately, also, like him, she waited for no answers. He did his best to

amuse her, filled with a pleasant feeling of virtue, and catching behind her back a look of sincere profound pity from Lady Jersey that flattered his sense of his good conduct mightily. Presently her questions began to slacken, she was obviously waiting for an answer to them now. "Ah, ha, my most attentive cousin, my devoted bridegroom, you have nothing to say, eh? Now, where have you been, that you have not paid your dutiful respects before?" She had abandoned the English tongue.

"I am here now, cousin, and very much at your service."

"Yes, I know, but this morning? I will bet ten of your fat English sovereigns that you have been to call on Frau Fat-fair-forty."

"What do you mean—what do you know?" he began, turning pale. "I mean—you must not listen to all they tell you, cousin; you must discredit tales to my disadvantage, as I need not tell you I should absolutely decline to listen to a word concerning you."

She pushed the little chess-table that was beside her with her foot so impatiently that several of the conventionally-carved monstrosities rolled to the floor. "*Ach!* you would evade. I long to see this elderly rival of mine." A malicious twinkle came into her eyes. "Lady Jairsay can talk of nothing else. But from to-night, after eight o'clock, it is all over; you know I look sharply after you from then."

"It is 'all over' now, cousin."

"Really?" persisted the Princess, curiosity still rife in her Saxon blue eyes. "Now this Frau Fat-fair-forty—"

"Madam, I can guess whom you are alluding to. The appellation is not respectful, that is not your fault, it is what you have been told — but it is a subject I would discuss with no one, and, pardon me, least of all with you."

The Princess, with a *moue* of disgust, turned a pettish shoulder to him. "Cross, disagreeable thing," she thought.

"How dared you tell her or even hint to her?" he

asked fiercely of Lady Jersey, later, when for a moment they were alone.

"My Prince," said that resourceful woman, with reproachful astonishment, "surely you don't want to be burdened all your life with an embarrassing wife-like devotion from that impetuous good heart? You had so much to say—but, pardon me, that was before you had seen her, doubtless sincere cousinly admiration is quickly deepening into—"

"*Gott im Himmel!* don't start that *verfluchtes* mockery. *Bei der Heiligen*, have I not enough to bear already without—"

"You take too solemn a view, Sir," contradicted Lady Jersey, airily. "Of course, marriage for poor commonplace, everyday people like myself *is* serious, it involves the greatest part of a woman's life, and at least a fourth of her husband's, coupled with—shall I say—an eighth of the attention he has to bestow. But in *your* case you want your debts paid—one; you want an heir—two; you surely wish to be rehabilitated in the trust of the public—three; the trust which your connection with the Papist has unjustly shaken. Well, this good, obliging creature does all this for you, and yet you must talk about having 'enough to bear.'"

"What," he asked drily, "does she get in return?"

"A grand position," protested Lady Jersey, stoutly, "everything a woman can want. Oh, do not pity her! But the position is hard, especially hard on me, that I should be at her beck and call."

"You asked for it!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"For your sake, only for your sake," she declared. "I am willing to bear any pain for that. The poor, ignorant, unpolished creature—she has her use, thank Heaven!—and you, peerless amongst men, will not be bored with her, save for a short time," and she caught his hand.

"No, by *Gottes gnade*, only a short time," he acquiesced.

"May the Lord grant a son straight away," said the lady, piously. "And meanwhile we may some of us be virtuous women without being purists." She laughed. "Some people with great virtue forget how they have been honoured and raised from their humble position."

"But you know, don't you, which pays?" he queried with indifferent, careless disrespect.

She raised her eyelashes and lowered them. "I am duly grateful, Sir," she murmured, "for other's despised crumbs."

He bent and kissed her—a kiss of lust.

After this first and particularly unsuccessful effort to conciliate his bride, the Prince did not approach her again, but leaving her apartments, which were really those of the Duke of Cumberland, in St James's Palace, facing Cleveland Row, he drove in a closed carriage, attended by Lord Moira, the short distance back to Carlton House, there to wile away the tedious day as best he might.

Moving the drawn blind with his little finger, he could see that the Mall was a mass of pushing, shoving, perspiring jollity. Men, women and children of all ranks and grades, and there was not one to be seen who lacked the adornment of a white favour, even the poorest sported it. And among the lower classes, who were waiting all day to catch a glimpse of the different celebrities who would be passing later to view the grand ceremony, this delight was particularly heartfelt and loudly and frequently expressed. Someone would start the national anthem or some patriotic song, and simultaneously all around would take it up, till the air fairly rang with it, and then would come three long loud hurrahs pealing over St James's Park until they must have reached the river. Shouts of laughter, too, were frequently heard, so happy were the people.

The crowd was so dense they progressed at a snail's pace. He could see flags and handkerchiefs frequently waved, and men in the street—hawkers—busily selling favours, bunches of white flowers, chap books and prints of himself and the Princess adorned with Cupids, hearts, true lovers' knots and other rubbish.

"Confound the crowd! What a devilish time we are getting there," he said, dropping the curtain, to Lord Moira, irritably. That gentleman returned a soothing answer. For years he had been very intimate with the Prince. As Lord Rawdon, he had acted as the Duke of York's second in the duel with Lenox, and when, after Valenciennes, he,

the Duke, met with his first disaster, 10,000 troops were despatched from Southampton to Ostend, Lord Moira —he had succeeded his father the year before—was in command. He was suitable in every way, having seen a good deal of active service as a young man in America, which reminds us that the Prince, who was just then in the throes of his volunteer fever, and was frantic to join his brother at the seat of war, had been most anxious to go with and serve under him, a plan that, naturally, the King would not hear of.

On this occasion, with tact, he said, "The *canaille* have so few holidays, your Royal Highness, do not grudge them their day's pleasuring."

The Prince, who, on entering the coach, had thrown himself into the right corner, now flung himself pettishly across the seat to the left. "It is no good, Moira!" he exclaimed. "That young person may mean well, but I shall never love any woman but Fitzherbert."

And Lord Moira, sitting opposite kept a discreet silence.

The horses increased in pace again, and soon they were arrived, George receiving, as he passed up the steps, a perfect howl of ovation, which he graciously and smilingly acknowledged.

At last the weary, trying day was at an end, and the brilliant, glittering throng of distinguished people began to assemble in the Chapel Royal, St James's, to witness the impressive, formal ceremony that seemed to their impatience never going to begin. However, all waiting has an end, and punctually at a quarter to eight a wave of intense excitement passed over all present. First, which seems peculiar, came the procession of the bride. She was led by the Duke of Clarence to a seat near to her Majesty's chair of state, her train being borne by four unmarried daughters of dukes and earls, of whom one was a daughter of Lady Jersey. "The ladies appointed to the household of her Royal Highness were likewise attending," then the Lord Chamberlain and the Vice-Chamberlain returned to usher in the bridegroom, "in his collar of the Order of the Garter, supported by two unmarried dukes." And when he was seated, in due regulation came all the great officers of the

Household: the Archbishop of York, the Lord High Chancellor, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was to perform the actual ceremony, the Earl Marshal, with his staff. Then followed the Princes of the Blood, the Lord Chamberlain of the Household, and last of all, the King. After him came the Captain of the Yeomen of the Guard, the Colonel of the Life Guards in Waiting, and many more. Then the Queen's Lord Chamberlain preceding her Majesty, who was followed by the Princesses in due order as to age, the Duchess of York, Princess Sopha of Gloucester, and finally the Queen's ladies and women of the Bedchamber. Of course, there were many others, but these are the chief persons, and this was the sequence of their entrance.

When the Prince first entered, it was noticed by a goodly few, and especially those that were near and so able to see more distinctly, that his bearing was dazed and bewildered, and he stared about him like a person in a strange place. Marshalled into his seat, he scarcely took his eyes off Lady Jersey, who encouraged him, from her place behind the the Princess, with smiles and glances as open as she dared allow them to be.

When everyone had entered and settled themselves, the Archbishop and all the other clergy took their places, and the bride rose to her feet, and with a scarcely perceptible instant's pause the bridegroom did so too; altogether they moved forward towards the plump red velvet kneeling cushions, and the ceremony began.

It went on smoothly until it was nearly over.

"Oh, God, Who by Thy mighty power has made all things: Who also (after other things set in order) didst appoint that out of man woman should take her beginning," prayed the Archbishop, standing over the bowed heads, venerable and stately, in his magnificent robes enwrapped by the brilliant light, "and knitting them together didst teach that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom Thou by matrimony hadst made one. Oh, God, Who hast—" He stopped abruptly, for the bridegroom had risen to his feet. There was a confused stir throughout the whole chapel, and the frequent hiss in all directions of low

whispers. Then the King went over and tapped his son smartly on the shoulder and apparently said something to him. With a start like that of an awakened sleep-walker the young man slowly knelt down again, and the ritual was completed.

"Then," we are told, "a solemn anthem was raised enforcing the awfulness of the sacred compact which their Majesties' eldest son and heir had just entered into with a Protestant Princess."

Outside, guns were again firing, rockets constantly burst into the sky, and bells clashed so merrily that it seemed as though they would not only rock their respective spires and towers but send the whole fabrics clattering down on to the heads of his Majesty's loyal, excited subjects below. The numerous illuminations, *flambeaux* and guttering candles dotted everywhere, made it nearly as brilliant as daylight. The wild, enthusiastic crowd burst into one vast roar as they appeared, it seemed impossible so much noise could be made by human throats, but they had been waiting for the supreme moment all day—waiting is thirsty work, and their liberal potations and health-drinking had increased the fervour that was there in the first place.

Twice they broke the cordon. "Hurrah! hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!" The people went frenzied mad when the Prince appeared with his bride, walking slowly and looking handsome and majestic, it was she who seemed bewildered now. He handed her in with a stately deference, and as the cheers broke out with renewed enthusiasm he said softly, almost wistfully, "How pleased they are. Our marriage is at least making everybody else happy, Caroline."

She snatched her hand away from him. "I am neither your Frau Fat-fair-forty, nor am I Lady Jairsay," she said, with a rude little laugh.

With compressed lips, he seated himself in silence beside her.

The door shut, and, to plaudits again and again renewed, they started thus very promisingly on life's journey together.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TWO WOMEN

"It seemed that I must see your face again."

"'ORRIBLE, disagreeable ting!" exclaimed the Princess of Wales.

"Oh, Madam!" protested Lady Jersey.

"I 'ate fair men and I 'ate zem still more ven zey are *dick*, an' more zan zat ven dey are *un perroquet* an' take ze long hours to don *son appareil*. As eef dere natural oogliness could be made *diminuer* by ze regimental, ze *peindre*, ze stays." She lounged back in her chair and pouted dismally at the sea, the crowd and the general bright animation without, for they were at Brighton and the month was September.

The Princess yawned loudly and openly and Lady Jersey yawned privately.

"I 'ates ze fair men," repeated the Princess. "Ze man zat I was in loove vif—zat I loov still," she corrected herself, "vas *Italiener*. 'Ee 'ad black curly 'air an' *une peau* olive and 'is *yeux* vere black, as black as ze *yeux* of ze Mistaire *Herr* Fox, an' ven he smile it were like 'Eaven. *Une soir* zere vas vat ve call a *Hof Bal*, zo I climb vrom my *Fenster*, an' to 'is *appartement* I go, nor back into my own do I geet until ze clock 'ave strook dree," she continued meditatively.

"Madam," repeated Lady Jersey, glancing round the room at the several interested persons already there.

"Ay, and so owt of my—vindow—*ja*, zat is ze vord—von, two, dree dimes I go, an' zen ze *Grossherzog*, my fader, he find oout." She shrugged her shoulders.

"And the sequel was that the visits were stopped, your Royal Highness," guessed the lady-in-waiting, with a final air as though anxious to change the subject.

"No, the sequel vas dat zey sen' me into ze *campagne*

for my 'ealth *pour longtemps*." Somebody laughed outright, and she glanced round with a flashing smile, well pleased.

"Surely she never can have lived the life she is so fond of describing," thought the spy, secretly.

"Zat is vy dis time I no fear feel."

Again Lady Jersey hastily interposed, one would really think she had at heart the wish to restrain the indiscretion of her mistress's tongue.

If this was so, she but led her to a still more questionable topic by her interference. The Princess picked up the half-fininished woollen stocking she was knitting and her agile fingers kept pace with her agile tongue.

"*Ein, zwei, drei*, I vant know more of ze one zat leeve in ze oouse on ze odaire zide, ze *amante* with ze name *nicht auszusprechen*. Did 'ee *marry* 'er? Ze King say that."

"Oh, the King said that, did he?"

"*Ja*, jus' zat. Did 'ee?"

"I do not know, Madam. His Majesty's thoughts wander you know, at times."

"Vere she now? *Zwei, drei, vier*."

"I know nothing, your Royal Highness, for certain."

"She is 'ere?"

"*C'est possible*," said Lady Jersey, shrugging her shoulders meaningly.

"Vere?"

"Madam, I know not."

"Oh, I do not care. It is noding to me."

Across the lawn could now be seen approaching a party of men; the two women at the window watched them.

"'Ere zey come!" exclaimed the Princess. "I zink zat ze dullest, stupidest person God Almighty ever did born am my 'usband, coosin *Georg*."

They were all in riding dress and, with the exception of the Prince, wore their own hair cut *à la Guillotine*, the latest fashion; he, however, obstinately stuck to powder.

"'Ee looks like a sergeant-major with 'is powdered ears," said the Princess, with a defiant laugh. She tossed her stocking on to the floor and, rising to her feet, walked slowly to a door at the end of the room. "I will leave you to *entretenir* zem, you will want not me," she said. "I go to dream of my *Italiener, mein Giuseppe*—I used to call him

Beppo." With a peal of laughter, she opened the door, waving aside Mrs Aston, one of her ladies. "*Danke-schön*, I vant no one!"

The door at the other end opened and the men came clattering in.

"You here!" exclaimed the Prince, eyeing the three feminine and two male intruders of his private sanctum with astonishment.

"It is ze only place zat my Lady Jairsay be 'appy in," returned his wife, "and 'ere I come to look for 'er—*comprends-tu?* But fear not, I go now."

"No, don't go," he said, and came across to her. "You look pale, and the day without is beautiful—will you honour me by driving or riding with me this afternoon?"

"I don't want to go."

"Would you walk, then? Exercise is good for you, if you don't go off the place even—will you come now?"

"You don't want me really," exclaimed she, with a foolish mortified pride. "Ask my lady-in-waiting or the other one that you have got hidden here."

She stepped outside and pulled the door so as to make it slam in his face.

"*Gauche!*" he remarked, coming back into the room.

"Very *gauche*," said Lady Jersey, "and more than *gauche*, Sir."

"What did she mean by the one hidden away?" he asked.

"Lud! that I cannot guess in the least," said Lady Jersey. "Really, Sir, her conversation and jests are getting beyond toleration. She was absolutely boasting just now of a lover and things that really—really—make me blush," she confessed modestly. "And she says such things about you and calls you such names, you ought to speak to her sternly."

"What did she say?" he asked, naturally enough.

Pocketing, with a great show of diffidence, her assumed reluctance, she told him. "I don't like to repeat things," she said pathetically; "it makes me seem double-faced, though my allegiance is to you before her. She said you were the stupidest, dullest person alive, more like a sergeant-major than one who had any claim to the appellation of a gentleman, that you were all paint, powder and

stays. She called you a *petit maître*, and said how fat you were, even when strapped in a uniform miles too small—one that it took an hour to drag together. Oh, my Prince, forgive me for repeating that ignorant, audacious creature's words, but you ought not to be kept in ignorance, and it is what she said." Delightedly as she spoke, she watched his darkening brow.

"Was that all?" he asked coldly.

"Would that it were," returned the informer, shaking her head sadly. "She finally made us the confidantes of such a declaration that I do not know how to explain it to you. She said she had a lover—an Italian."

"Oh!"

"And—and a baby."

"And a *what?*"

"A baby," confessed Lady Jersey.

"*Gott im Himmel!* Where is it, then?"

"Oh, it was not true," she said in her airy way. "It was simply to disgust and shock me. I could see that. It did."

"Abominable!" he exclaimed. "Revolting. Think of the scandal if such a thing got about. You believe it is a mad invention?"

"To a certain extent, yes, but there is no smoke without a fire, Sir," said she, and moved off to the table at the other end, where half a dozen of the Prince's rowdy friends were swilling his choice wines.

Somebody came behind him and touched his arm. "I was cross just now," came the voice of the Princess in German. He turned and looked at her distantly. "You must not mind what I say, I am not myself just now. I was cross and I was rude too," she persisted bravely, despite his lowering looks. "I wish to say I will drive with you, and with pleasure, I have changed my mind."

He shook her hand off his arm. "I have also changed my mind, Madam," he told her, icily, and walked down to the drinkers. "Permit me," he said, and filled a glass of Constantia. Having first kissed the side, he handed it with a ceremonious bow to Lady Jersey. She smiled, and, having just sipped it, put it down, whereat he took it himself again and ostentatiously drained it to the dregs.

As though it were a challenge that she was called upon

to answer, Caroline walked round the table to Major Hanger's side and, snatching the pipe of tobacco he was smoking from between his astonished lips, bit the mouthpiece firmly with her own teeth and, puffing out her cheeks, blew a great cloud of smoke right in the Prince's face. Then, twisting round, she bestowed the same insult upon Lady Jersey. Raising her hand, she hurled the pipe to the floor, where it flew into fragments, and then, with a haughty air, she swept indignantly from the room.

Now in the Brighthelmstone of other days there was no long Western Road of imitation London shops. All the business was done in the lanes. A tangled, bewildering maze of tortuous little courts, now given over for the happy hunting-ground of the curio lover and the people who buy and wear second-hand clothes, but then all the principal shops were there, all the business of bartering and selling. Here the country-women brought their baskets of golden butter, here was the butcher's shop, large and imposing, there was even a baker's for the very few who did not make their own bread.

Wedged in between the gorgeous butcher's shop and another one, scarcely less ostentatious, where the attractions of expensive tea, sugar, Virginian tobacco, evil-smelling tallow candles and cheese on one counter vied with rolls of printed calico and red flannel on the other, there was a little house, hiding away as though ashamed of itself. It was built of wood, and its frontage was so small that there was only one window showing over the front door.

About half-past six on the evening of this day I have been already writing about, a poor country woman, dressed in a dark woollen skirt, that had been patched, an old shabby red cape, clogs, and a calash, and carrying a large basket, came out of this house, and, turning to the right, walked hurriedly and nervously as though making for the Steyne. She evidently understood the intersected lanes, for she made no false turnings, and did not traverse the same ground twice. Passing a sailor's tippling house, several men came out, evidently filled with boisterous good-humour.

"Hallo, mistress," cried one, "you are in a hurry, eh?"

"Avast!" said a second. "What have you in that basket to sell? I've just come from six months' salt water, and my pay's in my pocket. You'll find me a good buyer, wench, if you throw a kiss with it."

"Stop the jade, Dave."

"Ay, stop 'er." This speaker was short and thin, he had a hungry look and was of a general horsey cut.

The man Dave, who was big and quite six feet in height, made a snatch at her cloak, and missed it, but a second one caught her arm that held the basket.

She looked at him. "Release my arm, if you please!" She said it imperiously.

"No, not so fast as that," cried the groom in his squeaky voice, and preventing the other from obeying. He came up too. Baiting a woman who was alone he always found rare sport, and there seemed here the promise of something especial just then.

"Joseph!" said the lady.

The effect was instantaneous. The fellow snatched off his cap and struck up "Dave's" arm. "M—Madam!" he stammered, and then a string of apology.

She pulled the calash still more open, cutting him short with, "I understand, you did not know."

"Let me go with you, Madam, until you are out of the lanes—they are rough at night."

"No, thank you, I am not afraid. And no one is to know I am in the town. Do you understand?"

"Yes'm. I'll just forget."

"Thank you," she repeated. "Good-night, Joseph."

"Good-night, Madam."

She passed on.

"Who is she?" was the general chorus.

Joseph blew a smoke ring, and then put the third finger of his left hand through it, afterwards pointing with the stem of his pipe in the direction of the Royal Marine Pavilion, in the stable of which he was employed as groom. The action was significant.

"By Gosh!" said one of the men, with reflective astonishment.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON BROKEN WING

"Eternal yearning answered by the wind."

MARIA—for it was Maria—continued on her way, and presently stood hesitating on the Steyne. It was just at a deserted time, and there were few people about. Secure in her disguise, it was not fear of discovery that made her pause, but the difficulty of first setting about the fulfilment of her purpose. To avoid attracting attention, she moved on slowly. Nearing the house she had for some years past lived in, she stared in astonishment, for although it appeared unoccupied (there were no curtains in the windows), outside stood a carriage and four horses.

She went across and swelled the crowd of half-a-dozen loiterers, and scarcely had she arrived when a lady came sweeping down the steps, clad in a long cloak of magnificent sable, with a coquettish little turban with one big, graceful green plume waving on her head.

It was the Princess. Truly, she missed no opportunity to foster the ill-feeling between herself and her husband, and well did she know how annoying the thought of Maria was to Lady Jersey. In open defiance of everything, she had suddenly insisted on visiting this house that afternoon. Taking his wife at her word, the Prince had requested Lady Jersey to ride with him, and just as she was preparing herself, she received orders to attend her mistress's drive. Her face now, as she followed the erratic lady from the house, was a study of ill-temper and jealousy.

The Princess looked about her and paused to stroke with her finger the cheek of a baby in a beggar-woman's arms. She clasped the tiny hand over a sovereign, and

said something in her kindly, broken English to the mother, for she adored all children. Turning away, she saw Maria—again she pulled out the silk bag purse, and then, as it was empty, called on Lady Jersey's aid. As the latter was in the act of handing some money to the Princess, who always liked to bestow her doles herself, something about the muffled figure riveted her attention, it may have been in the carriage, or build, it may have been only some subtle feeling, some animal telepathy; anyhow, she darted forward and seized Maria's arm roughly; she pushed the covering from her head, revealing her startled face and tumbled golden hair.

"Ah, Madam!" she cried shrilly, "you have not far to look for your rival, she is here."

"So," said the Princess, "your rival an' mine, Lady Jairsay, in ze *habille* of a *Bettelfrau;* zere is no von forgot so quick as ze old *Geliebte.* You an' me, ve need not be jealoouse." She laughed contemptuously. "Come!" she said.

After they had driven away, Maria pulled her hood over her head and, picking up her basket, moved on again. This was not the meeting that in her wildest dreams she could have imagined would take place, and she was angry and humiliated. She had thought to come and go secretly, and already she had been discovered twice and every moment the place grew more dangerous to her. The night was falling and it was misty and cold, the elusive summer-like beauty the day had displayed having entirely vanished. She walked right round the Pavilion twice and then again stood cogitating. Hiding as best she might, and blaming herself severely for her vivid red cloak, she waited until it was nearly eight o'clock, and then she went, not daring to stay any longer, towards the East Battery. The sea and sky toned in the dull uniformity of a cheerless grey, the former sighing the weary accompaniment of one tired — so very tired — to the wind which wheezed and grumbled sullen mutterings like a disagreeable old woman. She wandered dispiritedly on, half choked with disappointment, for early in the morning she must be gone. Suddenly her face flushed and her heart beat violently,

for she saw ahead two muffled great-coated men talking to a fisherman, and they were to her unmistakable, the Prince and Charles Fox. She allowed her pace to slacken.

"A narsty night, Mr Prince, Zur, a narsty night, I rackon," came the voice of the oracle. "I shouldn't mind—" He stopped and stared at her with frank interest, and she crouched down and tried to walk like an old woman. Fox unbuttoned his coat and felt for money and the Prince followed in mechanical imitation.

"Get something to warm your bones, old girl," said Fox, tossing a coin into her basket. The Prince was evidently going to do the same. Now was her one chance—dared she? She dropped her basket and seized his hand in both her own, she grasped it convulsively. She kissed it once, twice, thrice, with so much passion and fervour that he laughed and with difficulty pulled it away.

At this she recollected herself, and, with a hobbling curtsey, not daring to speak, picked up her basket and shuffled off.

"Egad, the old woman is surely a softy," said Fox. "Who is she, grandfather?"

"A stranger round these parrits, I rackon. I may hair seed 'er afore, Zur, but not as I raccalact," he answered cautiously.

"She more bit my hand than kissed it," said the Prince, with a laugh, tenderly feeling the assaulted member. "Ah, well!" And at that for the time it dropped. But in the middle of the night the Prince was awakened by loud and continuous sobbing.

"What is the matter?" he cried, starting up.

It had ceased.

"I must have been dreaming," he decided and gave the pillow a blow with his fist preparatory to settling on it again. A few minutes later and again the noise started: "Oh-ho! oh-ho! oh! o-o-oh-ho! So loud and continuous was it that he swung himself on to his feet.

Now the private apartments of the Prince and Princess in the poky little Pavilion were arranged like this: first came a sitting-room, then a dressing-room, and then again

the bedroom of the Prince, and these three were repeated in the rooms of the Princess, so that her boudoir was next to his sleeping chamber. He tried the door between—it was locked. He tapped on it, he hammered on it. "Is there anything wrong? Caroline, answer me! Are you ill? Do you hear me? what is it?"

"Notting, notting!"

"Unfasten this door!"

"I—I—sha'n't."

"Unlock the door at once and let me in, or I shall break it down."

Then finally, as though very reluctantly, he heard the shooting of a bolt and the door slowly opened.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked, for her face was all swollen and her red eyes could scarcely be seen. Apparently, although she had retired very early to her apartments, she had not thought of going to bed, for her disordered dress was the same she had worn all the evening.

"How dare you come 'ere?" screamed she. "'Ow dare you? 'ow dare you? Go back to *'er*, zat *voman* that insulted me dis afternoon."

"My good girl, what are you talking about? and how did you get into this hysterical state? You will make yourself seriously ill."

"Go back to 'er!" yelled the Princess, at the top of her voice, now almost in convulsions.

"I don't know whom you allude to."

"That *Katholik* voman that you married before you lured me over to zis country, that you 'ave hidden here."

"That I have hidden here!"

"I saw her myself to-day, and so did your other *Geliebte* Jairsay," said the Princess, "disguised as a *Bettelfrau* in a red cloak."

"*Gott!*"

"Ah, you see I find you oout," she said cleverly.

"You would not believe me if I told you I knew nothing of this—"

"I am not quite zuch a vool."

"Then I will not trouble you with any explanation,

Madam, and you will oblige me by taking more care of yourself and keeping a greater control over your temper. I have no wish for the country to be foiled in its hope of an heir."

For the Princess's condition was already far advanced towards this desirable end. "In the future you shall have someone to sleep in your dressing-room—I do not at all approve of your being so much alone. You will kindly go to bed at once—I will call your women up to attend you." He made for the bell that rang into their especial apartment, but she flung herself on him and attempted by force to keep him from the room. Fearful of hurting her, he withdrew into his own and shut the door. The sobs sounded meanwhile with redoubled fervour.

"Poor girl," he thought, "it's her condition that makes her go on like that, I suppose. Shall I go back and explain to her exactly how it was?"

Unfortunately, he did not, and contented himself with ringing his own bell and giving orders that the Princess's attendants should be summoned. Had he had the patience to reason and soothe her, or had he waited until she was calmer, in all probability this latter part of the story I have to tell would be materially different. As it was, he retired to a troubled couch, and, after tossing for an hour or so, got up and dressed himself without any assistance, and, creeping down, let himself out into the quiet dawn. He walked down to the sea and paced along the beach alone. He felt on fire, with the blood coursing hot and strong through his veins. So this was the explanation of that strange scene the night before. That she should travel all that way to come disguised in rags to kiss his hand! It was pitiful, it was wonderful, it stirred him to the very depth, it pleased him as nothing else could have had power to do. He welcomed the information as though it were a friend, he clasped it to him joyously, he revelled in the knowledge of all that it must mean, as he paced among the lonely sand dunes. There was no one there, no one in sight, but the world was getting every moment rosier at all that was promised to it by the approaching day.

Suddenly a thought came to him. What a fool he was!

She must be in the town now, or near it, and her stay was most certain to be brief, but at that moment she must be in it, or near it. He would have her found at once, but there was not a moment to be lost. At a quick pace he retraced his steps. Now how to find her! Rapidly he reviewed in his mind the different people he knew of who were in the town and with whom she might be staying. Then he thought, "Such people would probably be under the restriction of promised secrecy." Her hiding-place might, it is true, be discovered in the ordinary course, but it would take time—meanwhile, the bird would fly, and he felt he could not bear that, that now she was here, so close, he must see her, once touch her hand and meet her true, steadfast eyes, and he cursed himself for his gross stupidity, his unaccountable denseness in not knowing, feeling instinctively, the night before.

And to this end he sent various people he could trust to search the town from end to end, and make cautious and guarded inquiries, and all day long he fumed in an agony of impatience that grew with the hours. He could learn nothing, and such was the secrecy that had to be observed, that he dared make no inquiries himself. In the desperation of his extremity, he applied to Fox, and that good-natured person, mounting a horse, scoured the country round, and his was the first success.

The Prince had been right in his conjecture that she would not stay long in the town, for Fox discovered at an inn called "The Friar's Oak," about eight miles up the London Road, that a chaise containing one lady had stopped early that morning for breakfast.

When the Prince heard this, he swore a very long, very strong German oath. And that night, for the first time since his marriage, he wrote a long letter to Maria.

It does not matter what he said in the letter. There are some things too private, too tender and sacred for any third person, whosoever they be, to partake of. He wrote as only one can write when young and strong, and filled with the tender, protective self-immolation that is the higher part of love. And his feeling towards her now was purer and yet more fervent than it had ever been before.

She could scarcely, on receipt of it, believe it to be of his writing, so noble and unselfish were the feelings expressed.

At first, she would not open the letter; she thought to send it back, but the fear of those into whose hands it might fall deterred that action, and as she must keep it, she might as well open it. So she went to her room, and, locking herself in, first prayed long and earnestly for the welfare of the writer of the folded sealed communication, and then that she might do right and act fairly and honestly in all things, whatever the letter might say. Then she broke the seals, and, still kneeling, read it through. It was a long missive, but a second time she read it, she devoured it, the small letters with the big flourishing capitals, the numerous abbreviations that he always used—"wd." for "would," etc.—and there was actually one dear, delightful word spelt wrong. She gave an especial kiss to that word, which was very foolish, yet very human.

"My life, my whole soul is yours," he wrote. "All the better, nobler part of me resolves itself into you, my wife, my true wife! Thank God, dear, we were married, and there are living witnesses to prove it, for it makes you all my own even though bodily we are separated, and long, weary miles are between us. I long for the night, *Geliebte*, when my prisoned spirit, free for a brief while, can fly to you. Fool, fool! gross, insensate fool! I curse myself every hour, I marvel madly at my own insane, callous unsusceptibility. My heart is a poor thing, after all, not to have given me notice at the touch of those beloved lips. It should have started in its place at the glorious honour, and now, alas! that divine moment is irrecoverable, it is gone. I cannot but feel, if I see you not again, that death, after all, is preferable."

Naturally, until she read it, she did not know that he was aware of her having visited Brighton, but she did not mind so much now that she was safely back again. She had stayed at the house of Eleanor Lay, and as that young woman saw no one, and was absolutely devoted to her interests, it accounted for no one being able to trace her in the town.

As she read his words imploring a meeting, she knew she

dared not grant it. But how could she frame a written reply? She could not send one stiff and formal; that was impossible. She could not write as a friend; for that were a mockery. There was no possible answer for her to make, and she explained this to the Duke of York, who came, partly at the request of his brother and partly on his own initiative, at the end of a week to see if illness were the reason of her silence.

"Shall I take a message?" asked the Duke.

"It were better not. And yet, *Friedrich*, you may give him my love—just that—my heart's love, for it is his."

"Why did you go there like that?" he asked.

"I felt I must see him again," she said, "once. And God was very good and answered my prayer, for I not only saw him, I touched him."

"Oh, my poor girl," said the Prince, pitifully, "how unfortunate it is that you love him so, or, rather, that whilst yet you love him so tenderly, your ideas are so puritanical and your opinions so rigid and strict. We can't make a new world, we must content ourselves with the old one and take all the good the gods send."

"Ah, boy, when things are very heavy I ofttimes wish I thought as you do."

"Are they heavy?"

"Very heavy."

"And you have but to say the word, Sister," he exclaimed in astonishment.

"But I must not say the word, Brother," she answered, with a quivering little laugh.

CHAPTER XXIX

HER GRACE OF DEVONSHIRE

"We two have long been friends."

At twenty minutes past nine on the morning of January the 7th, in the year 1796, Caroline, Princess of Wales, was delivered of a daughter subsequently christened Charlotte, out of compliment to the Queen, and Augusta, which was one of her mother's names.

"Now," said everyone, "all these unhappy differences will cease." For the great cannot cover their sores with a cloak decently, and from end to end of the country the unfortunate scandal of the frequent differences and disagreements of these young people, who had been married less than a year, were but too well known and too often discussed.

Vain delusion! Ere the infant Princess was three months old, her parents were not on speaking terms, though they still continued to appear together in public. Nor did the world at large know that they had separated.

The position of the Princess at this time merits the deepest commiseration. She was in a strange country where the language that was spoken was one in which she could scarcely make herself understood. She was entirely surrounded by foreign enemies. The Queen was unrelenting in her vindictive spite, the Prince, her husband, detested her, and she was completely under the control of his acknowledged mistress, who even supervised her correspondence and visiting list, and regulated her very drives. Added to all this, she was slowly recovering from a very severe illness, for her labour had been prolonged and dangerous.

Her Grace of Devonshire

A biographer of the Prince gives us the following speech she is reported to have made to some friend:—"After I lay in, *je vous jure*—'tis true, upon my honour, upon my soul, 'tis true—I receive a message through Lord Cholmondeley to tell I was never to ab ze great honnair of in'abitin' ze same room with my husband again. I say, 'very well' . . . but I beg to have this polite message in writing from 'im."

In answer to her request she obtained a letter repeating this decision and "coveying with perfect good breeding invincible disgust."

"WINDSOR CASTLE,
"*April* 30, 1796.

"MADAM,—As Lord Cholmondeley (Lord Cholmondeley was Master of the Household to his Royal Highness) informs me that you wish I would define in writing the terms upon which we are to live together, I shall endeavour to explain myself on that head with as much clearness and with as much propriety as the nature of the subject will admit. Our inclinations are not in our power, nor should either of us be held answerable to the other because nature has not made us suitable to each other Tranquil and comfortable society is, however, in our power. Let our intercourse, therefore, be restricted to that, and I will distinctly subscribe myself to the condition which you required through Lady Cholmondeley, that even in the event of any accident happening to my daughter, I shall not infringe the terms of the restriction by proposing at any period a connection of a more particular nature. I shall now finally close this disagreeable correspondence, trusting that, as we have completely explained ourselves to each other, the rest of our lives will be passed in uninterrupted tranquillity.—I am, Madam, with great truth, very sincerely yours,

(Signed) "GEORGE P."

To this the Princess sent a humble yet withal dignified answer, and threw herself on the protection of the King.

About this time, finding a reconciliation, at that moment at least, impossible, she purchased Montague House at Blackheath, living there except when the Prince was at

Windsor or Brighton, then she went to Carlton House, where she kept her own suite of rooms, and where the little Charlotte was always lodged under the entire control of Lady Elgin.

All speak of her dignity and suitable behaviour at this time; her subsequent mad recklessness, that was to increase her burdens, had not then developed itself. "My mother wouldn't have been so bad if my father hadn't been worse," the Princess Charlotte is reported to have said. What an awful thing it is that a child should be brought into this world by people whose scandalous behaviour should merit such scathing criticism from her, their offspring's, very lips! But I must not write of the Princess, her woes and indignities, troubles and humiliations, great as they were—it would need a volume all to itself to consider the facts adequately—or of how eventually she obtained, for the first eight years of her life, possession of the infant Princess (for that, at least, the preliminary squabble was surely unnecessary), and retired with her to Shooter's Hill.

Through all this the country sided with her, and whenever she appeared an extraordinary ovation greeted her, for the public shrewdly guessed the truth of how matters were, though there was still to the absolute outsider a poor pretence of keeping the rupture secret. Whether the Prince was really carrying out the cut-and-dried intentions stated in the letter he sent her previous to the marriage, or whether he honestly tried during the short time they lived together to make the best of it, and reconcile himself to a certain portion of his life passed in her society (it need have been infinitesmal to allay wagging tongues), I do not know, but I give him the advantage of the doubt, and think honestly he did at first endeavour to behave with some decency and consideration.

The complete rupture was not published at once to the world, and at Brighton we learn, "She (the Princess) was frequently expected, and her non-arrival with the Prince the following August was said to have been prevented by the indisposition of the Princess Charlotte, for whose reception an elegant nursery had been constructed at the Pavilion."

From the same authority we learn that Lord Jersey, with

his wife, the Princess's dismissed lady-in-waiting, were in the town, and whilst my Lady inhabited Mrs Fitzherbert's old house, "accommodation was found for my Lord at the house of the Prince's cook, Weltje!"

In the year '96 this amiable, attractive and accomplished woman, the Duchess of Devonshire, suffered a great trial, for it was feared for a considerable time that she must experience the irreparable loss of her eyesight. She was abroad some months on this account, with her inseparable companion, Lady Elizabeth Foster, in the North of Italy, Switzerland, and then home *via* the Rhine. There is a long poem extant she composed addressed to her childern on the Passage of the Mountain of St Gothard, which was illustrated with water-colour sketches by Lady Elizabeth.

In the autumn they came home, and the Duchess, in a round of calls, visited amongst others Maria, bringing with her, her two slim daughters, Lady Georgiana and Lady Harriet, both grown-up young women, also a fat little ball of chubbiness, the Marquis of Hartington, then about six years old.

"Oh," said Maria, "I am so pleased to see you—both of you."

"You think old friends best?" asked Lady Elizabeth.

"Tried and true?" smiled the Duchess.

"A friend is better than a lover, a friend stays a friend," said Lady Elizabeth, guiding her Grace tenderly across the room.

"To be sure. Only women are always so wickedly insincere to their friends."

"*Cherchez l'homme*," suggested Lady Georgiana.

"Oh, yes. So much better that than the original rendering. I don't think a man throws honour and confidence away quite so recklessly as a woman."

"Perhaps it might be worth the throwing away," said the Duchess, suddenly. "To be the lover of a great man in its truest sense—to me there is something pathetic in the intensity of it. To see him as he is, to know and acknowledge all his petty faults and trifling failings, that is much indeed. Others only behold him arrayed for

the fray of life, they hear his noble, grand or humorous sentences, to them he is girt in armour, as it were, to do battle with the world. But when he is all disarmed and the fine dress and fine speech all laid aside, when you get the man himself, the real man, and soothe his troubles and listen to the secret ambitions that he keeps hidden from all but you, to tease him as no one else dare, to participate in his lightest childish moods, for when a man loves and trusts absolutely he is always childish—that is, I think, what makes a woman love him so.

"You think the world should be sacrificed for love, then?" asked Maria, surprised at this outburst.

"I did not say that. No, what I said was it is a grand thing to be the soul *camarade* of one of the world's giants, be he a Hannibal, a Shakespeare, a Michael Angelo—"

"Or a Demosthenes," said Lady Georgiana, with a malicious pertness not to be expected in a young girl.

Her mother raised her beautiful dim eyes to her face. "A Demosthenes if you will," she submitted quietly, and Lady Georgiana had the grace to look abashed.

"I am reminded," she continued "this is not a fit subject for children, but when one cannot see one thinks so much more deeply."

"Mamma has never got over Mr Fox's marriage," said Lady Georgiana, spitefully.

"I did not know he was married even," returned Maria. "May I ask to whom?"

The Duchess did not purse her lips, only affected, prudish women purse their lips—the Duchess was neither prudish nor, as the times went, affected. She only looked hard in the direction of a footstool. "He was married very quietly over a year ago to Mrs Armistead," she said simply. "Now that his affairs are settled, he has sworn never to touch a card again and he is thinking of retiring from active Parliamentary work."

"A moral clean up," said Lady Georgiana.

"Play was always his curse, like it has been my own, but I could never give it up—it is my only excitement, more than ever now. Betsy, where is Bijou?"

All the ladies looked around in bewildered anxiety, for

Lord Hartington had disappeared. He was over by the window doing some amateur gardening in Maria's pots of ferns with, for want of a better, a teaspoon for a spade, likewise, being unnoticed in the long room, he had skilfully abstracted some cut flowers from a vase and spilt the water it contained all over himself.

Lady Elizabeth started to her feet with a cry, "My darling, oh, you naughty, bad, wicked boy!" Rapidly she traversed the room and pounced on him. Returning, she plumped him on her knee. "Look at him," she said pathetically, after apologising for the litter. "He is wet through!"—feeling the front of his smock—"and more like a little nigger boy than anything else." This was true. All the pretty white freshness was tumbled, damp and earth-stained, and grimy were his little hands.

"Naughty boy!" repeated Lady Elizabeth, vigorously rubbing each separate pliable little digit with her herchief. Then she gave him a shake and a kiss and plumped him down on a footstool near. "Don't you dare to move," she ordered. And "Oh, Georgiana, do not let us go anywhere else to-day. I shall not be happy until I get these wet clothes off him."

"You are over-anxious, darling," said the Duchess. "Bring him here; he is not really wet, I'll warrant."

"He is more like your child than my mother's," said the elder daughter, as Lady Elizabeth complied.

"He is *our* child," her mother defended. "He came to me after my dearest sister here, when your father had lost all hope almost of an heir. She had troubles and so had I, together we have loved and watched and tended him, he belongs equally to us both.

She clasped the child to her heart with almost an air of defiance.

"He grows more like you every day," said Maria. "As we have now 'the beautiful Duchess,' so some day we shall have 'the handsome Duke.' Oh, how I envy you the possession of so dear a treasure."

"The position of a child of yours would be so unfortunate," the other soothed her, "you should be glad that you have none. It seems to me that nothing could be

worse than to be born to high rank and yet of no rank at all."

"Oh, let us take him home," wailed Lady Elizabeth.

"Yes, Betsy. You must forgive my rambling, for I am getting an old woman. Our visit has been unfortunate, my dear, but you must forgive Bijou, he is so young. We will come again and, better still, you must come to me."

And then they were gone. And, after all, there is not so very much in this chapter about the Duchess.

Time passed on. Spring and summer returned in due course. And again the short-lived foliage began to fade. And then ineffectual efforts were made by the respective friends of the Prince and Princess to patch up their differences. As, however, both the principal parties concerned were entirely averse to this, the notion dropped through sheer lack of encouragement, and it was the last and final endeavour.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DECREE OF HIS HOLINESS

"We must still pace slowly on and set our teeth until relief is sent."

"AND you thought of a convent," the Prince exclaimed. "*Mein Gott! You!*"

"Even I."

"*Mein Gott!*" he repeated.

"Don't you think I am good enough for a nun?" asked Maria, with her head on one side, toying with the long string of beads she was so fond of and constantly wore.

"Good enough! they would canonise you at once, I should think," he said innocently.

"My dearest boy, persons are never canonised until they have been dead two hundred years."

"So. And why, my *Mariechen*, did you think of becoming a nun?"

"Ah, now you want me to flatter you." She laughed, nestling closer to him.

"I only ask you to answer my question. If there is flattery in it—well, your flattery is exquisite because it is so rare."

"Well," she returned, "I thought of it because there would be peace and rest, and these two things I could not find in the world."

"And now you will stay in the world because it can give you joy and happiness?" he asked.

"I know not," she said, sobering. "But let us not talk of it. The world has, at least, given me this present hour, beloved."

For, quite suddenly, in the gloaming of this autumn evening, she had heard her name, and looked up to see *him* standing like a ghost in the doorway. Instinctively, she

had flown to him, only to an instant later repulse him as she almost cowered back. "What do you want here?"—her lips had shaped the words almost inaudibly.

With a quick stride he was beside her again, pulling off his glove and clasping his ice-cold fingers around her warm white arm. She wrenched herself free and fled across the room until a table was between them.

"*Es gilt mir alles gleich!*" he had laughed, throwing himself into a big chair by the fire. "Now, for a punishment, you shall come to me."

She did not move, but stood opposite, staring at him.

"By the Lord, after so dreary a parting I have a right to expect a warmer greeting, and I should get it, too, were you your own true self and not all wrapped up in a veil of priestly vapouring. I have only come for a long, quiet, sensible talk. I promise to go when you tell me, heart's desire. But leave business for a little, this supreme moment is ours, *mein Liebling, meine Allerbeste.*"

And she had come across slowly, and he had drawn her into his arms, shaking with heavy sobs. That was half an hour before and they had just begun to talk sensibly.

"But I must. A year ago you would not see me," he said.

"I ought not to now."

"You would not answer my letters, or listen to what I had to say. You must listen now. There is no Jersey, that was all finished and done with last autumn. The Princess does not want me; she has the child."

"Ah, yes. She has the child."

"Squealing little animal!"

"Do you not care even for her?"

"Care about her?" he exclaimed in genuine astonishment. "What, by the Trinity, is there to care about, or trouble to think of at all, save that she was not born a boy?"

Maria gave a half sigh that might mean anything. "I have been so jealous," she said, "horribly jealous. If only—It has given her a hold on you for life, there will always be the child between you as a chain, a link."

"The only thing I wish between us are as many good English miles as possible. Nay, on second consideration, I would sooner they were Irish ones."

"Dear love, will nothing persuade you to go back to her?"

"Nothing, nothing. She does not want me; I do not want her because I want somebody else."

She shook her head. "I had hopes, I prayed so fervently that you would be content with her. Almost directly after your marriage I read the dissatisfaction in your face."

"You did."

"Yes, two days after you drove to Windsor with her, you were bowing and smiling, but I could see by your eyes and the one little line that shows between them in your forehead when you are crossed."

"Where were you?"

"In the crowd. Many, many times have I been near you, dear, since four years ago."

"That time at Brighton?"

"Ah, yes, I must have been a little mad then to have been so indiscreet."

"Why did you come?"

"I felt I could not live longer without a sight of your face, and I not only got that but I kissed your hand." She took it in hers and kissed it again.

He laid his other on her head. "Then, if she loves me so much, my dear, docile girl will obey me now."

"You forget that your dear, docile girl is a middle-aged woman of remarkably firm will, George."

"I have a stronger, and I *order* you to return to your position as my acknowledged wife."

"I must have time to consider your authority, Sir."

"In other words—"

"In other words, seek that ghostly counsel you so much object to!"

"And if that is contrary?"

"Let us hope it will not be."

"But if it is?"

"Then God pity me, my husband."

"You would not refuse me?"—joyfully.

"I fear it is a trial beyond my strength."

"You are mine for ever, then! One bed, one board, one grave—"

"Not grâve."

"Ay, grave. It shall be so, it must be so. I could not sleep my long last rest if you were not beside me, my bones would stir. Ah, love, it shall be contrived somehow, for when you die I shall die too. I could not live with the light of those dear eyes extinguished," he said romantically.

She gave a humorous, tender little laugh. "I hope you will live in the light of them first for some time."

"Yes, yes; and now life is to be worth living in all its purest, noblest aspects. I will live a model life and I will be a model king. From to-day I will renounce all heavy drinking and deep play, in the future I shall scarce touch a card, and never, never, oh, my soul, will I be untrue to you again. By all that is sacred, by my hope of salvation I swear it!"

"Hush, hush! I know all that you would say, my dear. Heaven grant that when we begin life again together it will be with God's blessing; that is all I think of, it is my one prayer."

And this prayer of hers was granted to her satisfaction, to the demands of her conscience and the laws of her religion. And instead of a crucial test of her whole morality, she was spared further trial and her duty was pointed out to her clear and distinct by the highest authority, so that she had nothing herself to determine, no agonising choice to make, it was all cut and dried by those to whose commands her scruples told her to bow.

The morning after this interview with the Prince, she sought the priest who had first given her definite information in '94 of the approaching Royal Marriage, her confessor, the Reverend Philip Nassau of the Spanish Embassy.

"Can you tell me," she asked him, "if I am the real wife of the Prince of Wales, or is she, the lady who now bears his title?"

"Madam," he said, "the Catholic Church does not tolerate bigamy. Most unfortunately for you, you are his wife, and his wife you stay, whatever he may do."

"And the Princess?"

"According to the law of this country, she is his wife,

according to the law of the Protestant Church (he said Protestant Church as though the very words bore a nasty taste), she is his wife; according to the Catholic religion she is not. The Church recognises no law peculiar to any especial country or made by laymen. According to the Church, the Royal Marriage Act is not worth the parchment it is written on. The Holy Father, considering his abominable conduct, might set you free. Marriages *have* been dissolved by a Papal bull in very exceptional cases. This is an exceptional case."

"Oh, it might be dissolved," she said, the corners of her mouth dimpling.

"It might. But do not put too great a hope on this, my daughter. Do you wish to marry someone else? only a week ago and you so seriously spoke of a conventual life. After all, why should you not be free? This adulterous, wicked profligate has deserted you and bigamously married another. I agree entirely that you should have a proper separation. This man may have the audacity to attempt to thrust himself on you again with some plea of your being his real wife, as in truth you are, and unless you are protected the Church would have to point out that it was your duty to receive him."

"Would it?" she cried, her eyes flashing.

"Undoubtedly."

Her laughter trilled and her face for the instant was that of a young girl. "Father, I don't want a separation."

"No!"

"No, because the Prince wishes me to return to him, and I wish it too"—she spoke demurely.

The murder was out. He stared as though doubting if he had heard aright. "You wish it too? My dear lady, you must be mad. What of his wi—the Princess?" he corrected himself.

"He has left her and will never return."

"He must return. His whole duty lies there."

"But a minute since, and you called it bigamy, and a lot of other nasty names, Father."

"Tut, tut. You are right, Madam, I did."

"And so, you dear, kind Father, I first want you to say

that I shall be quite right and give me your blessing, and I shall be the happiest woman in all the world, I do believe."

"Astounding!" he muttered. Then very gravely he said, "My daughter, this is too great a matter for me to decide. I dare not take the risk alone. It involves the destiny of nations and countless unborn millions. The whole thing is unique, unparalleled. I must refer it to the Cardinal."

"Oh, what will he say?" she exclaimed, all the light gone from her face. "Will he keep me long in suspense?"

"There is only one decision he can make, I think," he answered gently, "so do not agitate yourself; but I must have his advice—it is a matter too great for me. Where is the Prince now?"

"At Carlton House, I believe," she said, answering his shrewd look with a rosy blush. "I saw him last evening for some three hours."

"You are not to see him again until I have seen the Cardinal."

"Very good, Father." She knelt for his blessing.

"God bless you," he said gravely, as he opened the door for her to pass out. "Be brave and have no fear." He put on his hat, then, and sought the Cardinal at once.

The Cardinal was equally dubious. They talked it thoroughly over, they surveyed it from every point, they weighed all the pros and cons, and in the end were in the same place they started from.

"I do not know what to say," exclaimed the Cardinal, whose name was Douglas, irritably. "I never could have imagined such a case, still less that I should have to deal with it."

"But, your Eminence, the Church does not for an instant acknowledge the second marriage."

"That does not trouble me. I do not consider that," said the Cardinal, "one instant. These are the facts: if we counsel and order this woman to receive back her lawful husband, so that he be rescued from a grievous state of sin; if it is by my authority and your authority—and this country, owing to the reconciliation, is plunged into political trouble or even civil war, which is possible."

"Very possible," agreed his subordinate.

"The future and advancement of the Church in this country will be placed in the gravest jeopardy, and with it many people's souls."

"And with it you and I," said the other.

"That is an aspect in which it has not appeared before to me, Father," said the Head, with dignity. "It is a matter too grave, the issues at stake are too much for me to judge in."

"Your Eminence!"

"You come to me for advice; I cannot give it. Father, I direct you to take this unhappy person's case for the judgment and decision of the highest person possible, his Holiness the Pope."

Nassau, instead of writing, took the sentence verbally to Maria.

"The Holy Father!" she cried, aghast, "to be troubled with my petty affairs."

"The value of all souls, irrespective of rank, are the same to his Holiness, Madam. And remember, although you are a private lady of unexalted birth, the position of—of the person equally interested with you in this is vitally different."

"True. Then, Father, what is the next move?"

"You still intend to go on with this? You wish to do so?"

"Oh, yes, Father, I am most anxious that this affair should be brought to a final head as soon as possible, and so is his Royal Highness equally with me."

"A letter dispatched at once," he calculated, "two days, three days—yes, quite a week. You ought to know in two months, Madam, quite by then, his Holiness's decision."

"Oh!" she cried, "so long as that?"

"Indeed, Madam, you must not expect it sooner."

"His Highness is so impatient, Father!"

"You could send a special messenger, but it would cost money."

"That does not matter; a messenger shall be sent. Where can I find one? A servant?"

"No—o. Someone who can explain. I will go myself, if I can get away, Madam."

"Father!"

"I expect I can get someone to officiate for me, I myself can do it in three weeks."

"What a difference!"

"Yes. Now understand. If you give up this idea after all, it may not be for the good of his Royal Highness, whom, however, it seems to me nothing can reclaim, but it will be for the undoubted good of the country and the Church."

"Sir, if the decision is beyond you and beyond the Cardinal, think how much it must be beyond me. I must hear the Holy Father's verdict."

He bowed his head in assent.

He went to Rome, he saw the Pope, and he was back again in a period of time that was for those days a marvel of quick travelling, but which seemed to those waiting as though it would never end. He brought with him a document written on thin parchment and known as a "brief."

It began—"Pius papa VI. *in Domino salutem et apostolicam benedictionem*," and went on to say also in Latin, "that the Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, having from the lofty seat of his wisdom considered the case of Maria Fitzherbert, who prayed his sovereign determination, could see no sufficient motive for her to decline to co-habit with her lawful husband, if he did most truly and humbly profess penitence for his sins of omission and infidelity against her, and swear most solemnly and sacredly to amend his ways." At least that was the gist of it. This momentous mandate ended with the day of the month and the year A.D., and as well the year of the Pope, and finally the words "*sub annulo piscatoris.*" Then came the imposing seal on red wax, impressed with "the fisherman's ring," a representation of St Peter fishing, surrounded by the words "Pius VI." A "brief," it should be observed, is a document of much less importance than a "bull."

When the messenger arrived in London, he sent word to Maria that, knowing she was so anxious to learn the result of his errand, he would do himself the honour to call on her that very afternoon, in fact as soon as ever he had

removed the dust of travel. Re-sealing this communication in an outer paper, she dispatched it at once to Carlton House.

Over two hours passed before anyone came, and then the Prince galloped up, flushed and excited.

"But five minutes since I got your letter," he explained. "I was out. At last, my jewel—"

"Hush, we are awaiting the verdict," she said. "Oh, listen, here he comes!"

The Prince walked to the farthest window and she sank into a chair beside the centre table; her fingers were ice-cold and her whole form shook violently.

Then the fateful representative of the highest living power she recognised entered silently, dressed in black.

She half rose, and her lips moved.

"Madam," he said hastily, "I have come to tell you that the decision of his Holiness is uniform with your desires and the wishes of the Prince your husband—herein you will find this formally expressed." With a bow, he handed her the open parchment. She stared at it an instant, and then the Prince, whom the priest noticed for the first time, came behind her chair presumably to read with her.

"Read it, George," she said unsteadily, passing it to him. "To me it is all misty."

He read it in a clear tone, translating it into English at sight.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as he reached the end, and of a sudden hid her face with her hands. Unmindful, the Prince bent over her, and Nassau, who had not seated himself, after one uncertain glance softly walked out, closing the door punctiliously after him. It may have been imagination, but he thought the day seemed greyer without.

Two days later Mrs Fitzherbert gave a breakfast. The whole of her house was thrown open and surely never before and never since was such a motley gathering seen.

"I am so happy," she said. "I must have all and everyone who will come to share it with me, because God has blessed me so and given me all my heart's desire."

For when the Prince had suggested that their recon-

ciliation should be kept a secret, she had laughed at the idea.

"Only for you, love," he hastened to assure her, "and because the country recognises the Protestant marriage. It would be loathsome to me to have you called a thing of shame."

"I do not care what they say," she said. "There was secrecy before, and though it is true that was different, yet will I have none now."

Also she vetoed the dinner to a few especial friends, his next suggestion, and instead gave a gigantic breakfast, that all might come who listed. Thirty years later we find her telling Lord Stourton, her subsequent biographer, she hardly knew how she had summoned the courage and resolution to pass through this severe ordeal.

Many who came to gape and stare and criticise went away abashed at these feelings, won over by her dignity and charm. They had come to be pleasantly shocked, to see something "naughty" or "spicy," and instead they found her graceful and dignified as, clad in white satin and looking like a lily, she received everyone, and afterwards made the circuit of the rooms leaning on the arm of the Duke of York, whose brothers were both present, for, with great cleverness, he had, in his sincere friendship for her, temporarily patched up his sparring with the Duke of Clarence.

And when it was all over and the guests all gone she and the Prince drove away to Richmond, just as they had done thirteen years before.

"That hideous day," she said when they arrived, going straight to the window and looking out on to the broad, low balcony. "Can anything ever dispel the memory of its horror?"

He followed her and took both her hands.

"My wife," he answered simply, "forget it. After long, weary wandering I have come home."

CHAPTER XXXI

MINNIE

"I have no child: and yet, if I had borne one,
I could have wished her hair had been this colour."

I THINK it was somewhere in the year '99, but of the exact date I am not quite certain, Horatio, wife of Lord Hugh Seymour, was peremptorily ordered to the South, being then in the far-advanced stages of consumption. Lord Hugh was the brother of the Marquis of Hertford and the captain of one of His Majesty's ships of war. Lady Horatio, having settled all affairs in England was much nonplussed by her last and final trouble, a baby of about a year old. It was her only one, and she greatly grieved parting with it, and yet part she must. Presumably amongst her own relations she knew no one whom she would care to trust, and Lord Hertford's own nursery was full of youngsters of his own. To make a very long story short, she sought amongst all her friends and relations, and for a long time could find no one to whom with a comparatively easy heart she could leave her baby. There was no one, she thought, who would give her proper attention and neither starve nor over-feed her, spoil nor tyrannise over her. Now Maria, happening by chance to hear of this dilemma, as she knew Lady Horatio slightly, went to see her and offered herself to take the child. She was so much alone, and people who have none always long for children, and here was the poor little thing going a-begging. It was rather a foolish sentimental act and she ought not to have been at all surprised at an unceremonious rebuff. However, Lady Horatio professed herself more pleased for Maria to have the child than anyone else of whom she knew. "You are not a silly girl, nor yet a

crotchety old woman, Mrs Fitzherbert. You will be a mother to my baby until—until—"

"Until you come back and claim her," said Maria, with brisk cheerfulness.

A tear rolled down Lady Horatia's flushed cheek and fell on the baby's face. "I shall never come back, I fear," she said. Then, cutting short Maria's contradictions, "You are, indeed, a good Samaritan, Madam. I only wish you could know the weight of anxiety you have in one instant lifted off my heart. I shall pray to God daily to bless you for saving my little child from being neglected by Frances." (Frances was Lady Hertford.) "I will bring her to you myself on Thursday, the day I sail—I cannot bear to part with her before then."

And Maria said that would do very well indeed, as she was not going to Brighton for quite another fortnight.

But on the Monday she arrived with the infant. "We are to sail earlier than I thought," she said; "to-night, in fact, so I have brought her to you. You will write by every packet, as you promised?"

And when Maria said she would, having kissed the child for the last time with a face too white and drawn for tears, she resigned her to her new mother's arms, and in due course sailed away in her husband's ship and so sails out of these annals.

Now Maria had kept this coming importation a secret. Every time she saw the Prince she meant to tell him, every time her courage had failed her, so he knew nothing, and when he let himself in with a latch-key at eleven o'clock that night and mounted the stairs, he heard sounds more like what he was accustomed to hear at Carlton House, a few years before, on the rare occasions when he had approached his daughter's rooms, than in this silent orderly residence.

Maria came running out *en déshabille*, with her hair half tumbling down and her face all flushed and animated.

"I—I did not expect you to-night," she stammered.

"Why, girl, what is the matter?"

"It's nothing—everything. I mean"—confusedly—"it is

a surprise I have been preparing for you. I—oh, George, don't be angry, don't send her away. I have promised so faithfully, dear, and I thought you would be pleased."

He took her by the shoulders with a playful shake. "Try and speak coherently, Madam."

"Anything as long as I do not fall under the ban of your Royal Highness's displeasure," she returned, agreeing with his mood.

"I am afraid you will most seriously offend me if you do not gratify my curiosity. Don't you know that we men are just as curious as you women, only we are ashamed to own it?"

She held his arm nervously and with frequent corrections told him.

"So," he said, as she finished the confession. "And that is the way you spend your time in my absence, is it? Well, perhaps you had better let me see this little baggage."

"By all means," she answered, pushing open the door of her room. "Come in, she is here. I have got a proper nursery, but I did not want to part with her to-night; I don't like the nurse."

She escorted him across to where on the bed, enthroned on pillows and shawls, lay the Honourable Mary Georgiana Emma Seymour, cooing and kicking. "So this is my rival in your affections." He gravely extended one finger, an action that held irresistible charm in her first youth for the infantile mind of the Princess Charlotte. But this young lady only wriggled and said, "Goo—o."

"That means you are to pick her up," explained Maria, leaning in front of him and suiting the action to the word.

"So!" he repeated, and, turning, threw himself into an armchair by the fire. "You have learnt the language quickly, my *Mariechen*, or does every woman know it by instinct?"

"Perhaps," she said, with a little shadow on her face as she came across hushing the child.

He sat up and drew them both on to his knee, looking into her clear, true eyes. "You see it was not to be," he

said softly, speaking of what they were both silently thinking of. "And so, heart's dearest, if she is any comfort, any joy or pleasure to you, why, keep this little maid."

A week later they went to Brighton and took the baby with them. It made but little difference at first to the Prince, for Maria was careful that he never should be annoyed or worried by her, and kept a sharp curb on her tongue so as not to talk on this, to her, all-absorbing subject unduly. But after a while, his first words would be "Where is Minnie?" when he came into the house, and he was restless and dissatisfied until she put in an appearance. For Minnie they called her when she became too big for Baby.

"Mary won't do," said Maria, decidedly; "it would be very confusing. Many of my own relations call me Mary still. No, I don't like Mary."

"I have a sister Mary, too," said the Prince.

"No, we won't have Mary. I don't think we want a second Molly either, to choose that as an alternative would indeed be out of the frying-pan into the fire."

"We could not have a second Molly, however much we wanted her," objected the Prince. "There never will be but one."

She smiled at him. "What do you think of Minnie?" she asked.

"I like it very much. Yes, Minnie will do."

And Minnie it was.

The child throve apace. News came at uncertain intervals from her parents, how Lady Horatio was better, how she was worse, but never was any mention made of her return, and, as the time passed on, it came to be that nothing in the world was more dreaded, both by the Prince and Mrs Fitzherbert, than the loss of the child, for how dull would have been the place without her! How silent! How deserted! To the Prince she was an amusement, a plaything to sit on his knee and play with his watch chain, and sell kisses for sweets. To Maria she filled in the long, lonely hours, as nothing else could have done,

with occupations both profitable and pleasant, her little restless toes and her little restless elbows were everlastingly insinuating themselves everywhere, and, as time went on, she had to have instruction in twice one are two, and to be initiated into the art of forming pot-hooks.

Altogether, the young lady seems to have had a most delightful youth, with no whim ungratified; she was the pet, the spoilt darling of the very tonish "smart" society which revolved round the Prince, and of which, of course, he was the leader. Oh, she was to be envied, was Miss Minnie. The Prince taught her to ride when she was little more than a baby, and Maria made the first little shapeless sack of a habit she wore on that occasion. The 23rd of November, her birthday, was kept as a great *fête*, with a children's party at the Pavilion, that is, when they were at Brighton.

Lord Stourton says that Maria told him that at that period they were extremely poor, how this was I do not know, for the Prince's Civil List, irrespective of the money put aside for the Princess, and to pay the enormous debt of £639,890 (which, it was hoped, it would do in twenty-seven years), was, at least, without the Duchy of Cornwall revenues, per annum £100,000. And yet nowadays the Irish members grumble at the Civil List — but let me confine myself to the days long passed that I am attempting to write of.

The worst of writing these annals is, that they cannot be an equal picture of life, taking the calm with the storm. For what possible interest is there in an everyday existence, in the life of a person, however august, when once we have penetrated its mysteries? I could write pages of our Prince's generosity, his good-nature, his love of play, and his mad craze for horse-flesh and building. I could tell little anecdotes by the dozen of the reviews he would hold on the Sussex hills, the boyish jokes he and his brothers would play, and, did I do so, I should reach the end of my book without half telling my story proper. And so it will be understood why I write sketchily, and ever and anon there comes a break of several years, for I do not here attempt to deal with the fair-weather passages in the life of

my poor, ill-treated Maria, but rather to dwell on her troubles; that is why I hurry from one year to another, and even have to leave out many minor things of a lesser importance. Of the more important ones, the next thing after Minnie's advent was, that Maria at Brighton moved. Hearing by accident that Lady Jersey had for a season inhabited her house, or rather the one she always stayed in, she not unnaturally took a dislike to it, and so looked out for another. This was somewhat more difficult to find than she expected, and the Prince suggested she should build a house. Could he let such an opportunity go by? Accordingly a piece of waste ground was purchased, almost the last piece surrounding the Steyne, so rapidly was the place growing. It is on the west side, as you face the sea, and next to a little turning called Steyne Lane, where the front entrance to the house now is.

Mr Bishop tells us that on this site stood a tarred wooden fisherman's hut, and the man who inhabited it when the land was bought was named Male. This was swept away, and the present Steyne House, in due time, was reared. Originally, it had a front of Egyptian architecture, but, unfortunately, this, during its first winter, was blown down, and the present edifice of the Italian school was erected, and has stood almost as it is now for ninety-seven years.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SECRET PASSAGE

"Now am I free and gay—light as a dancer when the strings begin."

October 3, 1805

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE PRINCE OF WALES

For the Benefit of the Widow and
Children of NAT HARMAN.

Positively for one night only, and the last
but two of performing this season.

To begin precisely at seven o'clock,
Oliver Goldsmith's celebrated comedy

THE COUNTRY GIRL.

To conclude with the favourite one-act play

THE ROMP.

On this one occasion BETSY and Miss PRISCILLA TOMBOY
by Mrs JORDAN.

If the above important announcement had had "under the patronage" of Mrs Fitzherbert there would have been more truth in it, if it did not look so well, for she had laboured untiringly in this cause.

In the Shadow of the Purple

Nat Harman was a Brighthelmstone fisherman who, being accidentally drowned, had left destitute a wife and five young children, and this reaching her ears, she had taken the matter up with great thoroughness and lively interest. Witness the temporary emerging from private life of the one and only "Romp," who had done nothing since Piarazzo in '99.

The name of Mrs Jordan—what a magical thing it is to have a well-known name—was, fortunately for Maria's innocent schemes, sufficient to pack the house to suffocation and especially in conjunction with the Prince's patronage.

To her horror, when the evening came, he said, "I say, Moll, it's a confounded nuisance—are you particular for me to put in an appearance to-night?"

The disappointment was written legibly on her face.

"Oh, very well, then, if you insist."

'It will spoil it if you do not," she contented herself with saying. "They have paid their money and taken their seats to see you."

"Very good, *Kindchen*. How soon are we to start?"

"It is time now."

"Martinet. Let us make a move, I am going to walk."

"Oh," she said. She had so counted on his driving up with a little flourish of trumpets.

"My dear girl, how on earth do you want me to go? The place is a barn."

"It's not that. If you'd driven up it would have pleased the people, and the manager would have received you. I do not see"—doubtfully—"how he can receive you if you arrive on foot."

"My darling Molly, I wish you would understand that your adoring spouse is not the principal performer in a circus. To drive would be foolish—would it not, Miss Francis?"

The lady simpered. "La! Sir, as though I could pronounce judgment! Your Highness's taste is so exquisite always."

"Well, well," he said, well pleased, "if you are ready, ladies, let us start. Has anybody seen Robin Hood?"

"Who may Robin Hood be, Sir?"

"It's my latest name for old Sherry, Miss Francis—do

you not think it suits him? He tricks his creditors, I verily believe, for the fun of the thing."

Miss Francis laughed and stepped outside the open window as her Royal host indicated she should do. "See, here he comes," she said.

It was true. Mr Sheridan came puffing at great haste towards them, and the somewhat straggling party walked in groups across the lawn.

It was very different, indeed, here to what it was at Windsor, where the most stringent rules of etiquette and precedence were insisted on by the Queen, here people filed off as they pleased, with the companion that for the moment best pleased him.

"Dick!"

"Sir."

"Mrs Fitz. wanted me to drive, if you please, to-night—was it not absurd? The place here is only a barn."

"It's a grand night to-night, Sir. I saw on my way here many fine dames decked regardless of cost. Unfortunately, as is the fashion, though they were so extravagant as to quality, their niggardliness as to quantity was even more marked than usual, and the more they showed the less I wished to see"

"Oh!" exclaimed Catherine Francis, veiling her eyes, with a modest blush.

"And their prudish frowns and resentful looks are as ridiculous as it would be to see a board with notice of spring guns set in a highway, or of steel traps in a common, because they imply an insinuation that there is something worth plundering where one would not in the least suspect it."

"Oh, Mr Sheridan, why are you so down on all the lady visitors to the town?"

"All! how could I be, when the town is graced by your presence, my dear lady? Nay, I did but speak of some old women who, endeavouring to put themselves back, like the clock, to girlhood again, bare their bodies, as they mask their minds, with ingenuousness, and are more careful as to the looks of their lips rather than what comes from them."

"That sounds as though it were from a play. What are you writing now, Sherry?"

"At the present moment, nothing, Sir. However, I have in contemplation a volume of good stories about myself—and every one of them will be absolutely false."

By this time those in front were arrived at the wicket gate they made their exit from, and had come to a pause; our trio hastened their footsteps.

"The gate is locked," said the Duke of Clarence.

"The gate is locked," echoed Miss Francis's papa, giving it a confirmatory shake. The party of about twenty persons clustered round.

"Stop!" ordered our Prince to somebody who was starting at a run back in search of keys, "there is a way of passing through without keys."

"Damned if I can see!" ejaculated his brother.

"You know, Dick?"

Mr Sheridan shook his head.

"Not even Philip? Why, this is the way." He straightened himself an instant. "Mind, Moll. Be careful, Miss Francis." He hooked his arm around the woodwork in and out. One, two, three wrenches he gave.

"Heave-ho!" exclaimed the sailor Prince in excited sympathy, as at the third effort he staggered and the gate, with its heavy iron stanchions, came completely away. He had dragged it bodily from the ground, and it weighed one hundredweight at least and was four feet wide.

"It was not seemly, Sir," said Maria, distressed.

"Surely more seemly than to keep ladies waiting while a prolonged search was being made for keys," he said simply, and fell back again with Miss Francis. He found her bright-eyed and to his taste, and admiration of what was really a fine feat of strength was writ large on her face.

There is no need to describe Jordan's inimitable Betsy and her dainty, 'witching, artless Romp, suffice it—she was a great actress playing her best parts for charity. The applause was deafening, even Sheridan had to own "She's not quite so bad as usual, and as long as it isn't my stuff she's murdering, well, it's all right"—for, be it known, he was a person who declared himself totally impervious to her charm.

It was over at last. The last pert toss and roguish twist of

Betsy's head, the last defiant little kick of Miss Tomboy's neat toe; the curtain had descended on all her bewildering attractions, and a chastened Mrs Jordan appeared instead with an epilogue and address on the subject of the deceased Harman and the Charity that had gathered them all together, and, thanks to the Royal patron, both highflown and stilled to our ear to-day. "And we know he will never forget those principles which placed his family on the throne of these realms," were the concluding words. Mr Sheridan in his box next to that of the Prince hummed softly in the air of Philip Francis (for this was before their quarrel by a year), "Hope told a flattering tale," which caused Sir Philip silent, agonised convulsions.

"*Donnerwetter*," said the Duke of Clarence to Maria, "the little craft is just as trim as the day I first sighted her. You would never think she had a daughter nearly as tall as herself, I'll burn if you would!"

Without, there were chairs waiting for the ladies.

"We are going to walk," said the Prince to Maria, handing her in. "We shall arrive soon, however, after you at Steyne House."

"At Steyne House!"

"Yes, heart's dearest, they are all to be your guests to-night. I want to show Philip where I propose to knock down the wall so as to enlarge—"

"Oh, no you won't," she exclaimed, laughing, as she leant back. "I like a house to live in, not to contemplate the future thereof. You may pull down and alter your own houses as much as you choose, but leave me mine, Sir."

Including herself, there were half a dozen ladies in all, and scarcely had they arrived, when the crowd of men, headed by the two Princes, came rushing on in an overwhelming tide. For a reason best known to themselves, like a pack of schoolboys let loose, they started to illuminate the house with candles, *flambeaux* and coronation lamps, and in the midst of all the bustle and excitement, peals of laughter and oaths, the heroine of the evening arrived from the theatre.

"Well, how did I do?" She was flushed and hot, and about her face still clung traces of red and white, and there

was a suspicion of black cork about her eyelids—there was no grease paint then, remember. "God! I'm sweating like a bull. How did I go, d'ye think, Dick? Didn't you wish I was in your little barn, and I was bringing it in to line your pockets, you old pot of swipes? It was a thundering good house, choke full."

"A charity audience will applaud anything," said Sheridan, maliciously. "It was a better show that you gave to-night, though, than Piarazzo, Nell." He was looking down from a ladder.

"La, filthy! It was the play."

"My dear girl, you could not possibly have been worse."

"No more could the play."

"It wasn't my play, anyhow; *Kotzebue* wrote it."

"You eliminated any good. I spoke the epilogue, I remember. Oh, Lord! I say, Maria, you ought not to have that child about at this time of night, with all these windows open, she will catch her death of cold."

"Oh!" exclaimed Maria, properly shocked, for the little motherless Minnie—Lady Horatio had lately died—with ten bare little toes and a halo of paper-encased curls was standing in a little white smock in the doorway, the shouts and laughter and general uproar had aroused the maiden.

"You must go back at once, dear."

"*Minchen!*" exclaimed the master of the establishment, who came tearing up in an undignified fashion with a hammer. "Awake, my sweetheart. Let her stay up, if she wants to, poor little baggage."

"Come here, then," said the actress, good-naturedly, and in a trice had young miss, toes and all, covered with her shawl and as snug beside her on the sofa as her own children were, tucked up in their white beds in London fifty miles away.

Then she picked up the threads of her conversation with her former manager at the precise point she had dropped them.

Maria, who had been dispatched by the decorators to find a piece of pack thread, hearing a tremendous hammering, louder even than their noise, proceeding from her kitchen, entered it to ascertain the cause of the uproar.

An extraordinary sight greeted her. The place was in complete possession of the Prince's servants, who were laying and placing tables and hanging the walls with crimson. They told her that they had orders to serve as soon as possible a supper there, which they were bringing across.

"Supper in the kitchen, what an innovation and a novelty of novelties to you!" she cried to the Prince as she returned.

"Oh, I did not want you to know," he said disappointedly, "till it was ready. Lights in the upstair windows, you see, will spoil our illuminations."

"You *baby!*" she declared, laughing.

"I would sooner be young than old, *Herz-allerliebste*—it is better, believe me."

"May you stay young in heart for a long time, my dear."

If frivolous trifling, grave attention to petty nothings and general wasting of his time are the qualities required to constitute the character of the young at heart, the Prince was young enough and to spare. He seems to have made himself supremely ridiculous, considering his age, by his boyish gambols. Practical joking and foolish fun are well enough in their way, but surely they should not form the serious daily routine of a middle-aged man, and it was coming to that, for the twentieth anniversary of his marriage with Maria was within a few months of arriving.

Many years afterwards we find Mr Grenville (of the celebrated memoirs) properly shocked at the disorderly crew, the tag-rag and bobtail King William surrounded himself with at Brighton. I tremble to contemplate his feelings could he have seen the nobodies and adventurers that about this time our Prince drew his intimates from in so undignified a fashion. George Brummel (George the less) was now beginning to worm his way into his favour, although the Prince called him "a mere tailor's dummy to hang clothes on," and another young man, a *protégé* of Maria's, Benjamin Bloomfield, both of them were in the famous "Tenth."

And then there was the everlasting building. At this

time the Prince had three schemes on hand. Firstly, Maria's house, which, now it was refinished, he was at once most anxious to alter. Secondly, the new stables that were to cost a prodigious sum, for the roof was to terminate in a large glass dome, and every one prophesied that when the scaffolding was removed it would all come down. Thirdly, he had just joined his numerous possessions of land together, and the traffic that up till now had run right through the centre and passed his front doorstep was being diverted to the left, the Steyne, or to the right along a thoroughfare he was having made, still called the New Road, though nearly a hundred years old.

Behold him, therefore, the morning after the benefit and subsequent meal partaken with the domestics, with Porden, the architect, and several satellites and a man named Repton, with designs for artificial gardening, employed busily improving, planning, directing. There he was drawing little plans with his cane on the gravel, with a lead pencil on the wall near, pacing with long strides to roughly ascertain the distances, and busy with other dear delights of the same kind.

"The window would come here, your Royal Highness."

"And the door there"—pointing to the gravel plan doubtfully with his cane.

"No, no," says the architect, further modelling it with his own stick. "There, Sir."

"I don't understand," the Prince would return agitatedly. "Now, which is Church Street?"

"There, your Royal Highness."

"But this is the first loose box."

"Not according to the plan."

"Oh, damn the plan! Let us start afresh"—moving a few steps to an undisturbed piece of gravel. "Now"—drawing a straight line—"let us call this Church Street."

And the whole business went through again. It is very true that fools build houses for wise men to live in.

On this occasion his attention was distracted by Mrs Jordan, who was tripping daintily on the grass some distance away, not that she intruded herself upon him, but Miss Minnie, who was with her and had struck up a sudden

friendship with her, came running with outstretched arms at full tilt towards him, with the assured, confident air of a child who had never been repulsed.

"*Kleinste!*" He dismissed the men with a civil nod, he was always considerate and polite to those in his employ; he never had a servant down to the youngest stable-lad that did not adore him. "Why, where is the *Mütterchen?*"

Miss Minnie hid her face bashfully against his arm as she clung to his hand. "Don't know. You silly Prinny, talk proper."

"My *Schätzlein!* Thou art a sturdy little *Engländerin.* For all thy tender years, thy innocent lips unknowingly utter reproof. I must remember that I, too, am English even as you. Good-morning, Madam."

Now he addressed her, thus taking the initiative, Mrs Jordan turned the vivacious flash of her sunny smile full on him, and in an animated exchange of raillery amused him vastly with her impertinent sallies and lively wit.

Presently Maria came over the grass with some of the party of the night before, she was making a short cut for her stables, where she had something especial to show Mr Sheridan, who professed a great knowledge of horse-flesh and could in reality scarce tell a race-horse from a carriage-hack.

She paused a moment and her guests paused with her, when a shout of delight from Minnie proclaimed the advent of the Duke of Clarence. She had a great affection in her childish heart for this bluff gentleman whose stock of fearsome sea stories concerning mermaids and whales was as endless as his list of romping games. He raised her on to his shoulder with a skilful, experienced air.

"Enthroned," said our Prince, as they approached.

"*Minchen die Königen,*" returned his brother.

Maria, marshalling Sheridan, passed on, the others following. Having duly admired the new importation, Maria next began to point out to him some of the compactness and conveniences of the place. "But *when* the new stables are finished I expect to keep all my horses there," she said.

"These are rather dark," commented he.

"And would be darker but for that window at the end there. It looks over the 'Friends'' burial-ground and, though they wish it bricked in, yet they most good-naturedly consent to forego their claim for the time, to oblige me, on my paying a nominal sum of one penny a month."

Mr Sheridan's eyes expressed the greatest amazement. "You *want* to keep it open?" he exclaimed.

"Of course; how much lighter it makes the place and how dismal it would seem in here, if I had to close it the men could hardly see to do their work without artificial light."

"And you absolutely pay thirteenpence a year to keep it open?"

"Well?"

"Oh, dear me, Ma'am, nothing, of course; but, though I have heard of people knocking their brains out against a wall, I have never before met anyone who went completely out of their way to sustain what was an intense hourly danger to them of ultimately becoming their ruin. Take my advice and board it up to-day. Like father, like son, they say, and— Look at that."

The unconscious Prince had strolled to the window, and a young maiden in sober grey could be seen tripping demurely along.

"A neat ankle," observed he, with the air of a connoisseur.

"You are answered why, Madam," said Mr Sheridan. "Shut it up ere danger too great to be repaired is done."

"They are strange people," said the Duke of Clarence. "I met one t'other day, honest John Fry it was; I bade him 'Good-morning, John,' and he answered, 'Good-morning, William,' and went on his way."

"And how are your stables going on?" asked Maria of the Prince. "I saw you just now with Mr Porden."

"Who is Mr Porden?" asked Mrs Jordan.

"What, have you never heard of Mr Porden? Why, here we live only for him. We get up early in the morning on his account, and at breakfast we talk about him, our whole day is spent as he wills, our occupations are regulated by

him of a night, ere we fall asleep our last thought is of him, and when Morpheus lays his fingers on our eyelids we dream of Porden!"

"Moll, Moll, what a cruel exaggeration."

"In short," she continued, unheeding, "Mr Porden is the architect of our grand new stables."

"I should dearly love to see these stables," said the actress.

"Would you?" asked their owner, beaming at an unexpected chance for mounting his hobby. "They are very unfinished as yet, but I hope great things, and as far as we have progressed you shall see, and willingly." He put himself beside her to walk the little distance. "The design, Madam, is so arranged that when a person is standing in the centre the contents of every stall can be seen. Over them there will be servants' apartments, to the right is to be a riding-school, and to the east I shall have a tennis-court. I should like," he concluded meditatively, as he opened a door for her to pass through, "to have a palace built on this plan, the central area to be one vast hall of accommodation to the apartments ranged around, with four staircases. There now!"

They were within the building, which Mrs Jordan immediately pronounced magnificent. He walked all round with her, pointing out this and that. There was to be the entrance to the courtyard which was to lead to the street, there the grand gateway into the grounds. "I shall have a drive right round them made."

"And where does that lead to?" she asked, pointing to a big black pit that yawned on one side and had apparently been newly dug.

"Cellars," he said confusedly.

"Cellars?" asked Maria, joining them.

"Or drainage perhaps. I cannot tell you, ladies, without referring to the builder or the plan."

Taking the hint not to ask more questions, Mrs Jordan passed on.

"I am inquisitive," said Maria, detaining him. "Why are they making this deep excavation? 'tis new since I was last here."

"Pandora."

"I fear no troubles. Perhaps there is Hope for me at the bottom."

"Or despair," he jested. "You are too optimistic, *Mariechen*. Well, I will relieve you from the feminine anguish of curiosity, but you must keep the secret. Now my possessions are compact and in one I am going to have an underground passage made, it shall be known to none save you, who will have the freedom of it; both the entrances will be so carefully concealed that none will guess."

"This sounds highly romantic. Where is it to lead to?"

"Right under the road, and you, armed with the special key, can then always have the way to trip straight to my heart."

"Supposing I came instead by the road?" she said, laughing at the irrational fancifulness of this his latest craze.

"Supposing a deadly dragon barred your path?"

"Ah, supposing. You ought to have lived when the world was young, George, and there were giants to slay and beautiful maidens to rescue from gaunt and dismal castles."

CHAPTER XXXIII

UNSER MÄGDLEIN

"This child scarce yet awake upon the world."

WHEN one writes a story that extends over a long period of years, unhappily, if one wishes to be an accurate recounter, the time comes when the meaning of what is contained in the word obituary must be dealt with, and, alas! that time is with me now.

The Prince's stay at Brighton was prolonged by Nelson's victory at Trafalgar, for he patronised two balls, one in honour of the great triumph at which he was present, and a second for the benefit of the widows and orphans of those that fell, at which he was not, at least we find one of the Francis girls writing to a married sister to that effect.

Maria had a cold, she says, and he stayed to keep her company.

They had been home but a few days when Maria met the Prince with a scared white face. "George, what do you think? Minnie's father is dead!"

It was true. Lord Hugh had died at Naples just six months after his wife.

"Indeed! poor fellow. Never mind, the little lady shall never feel the loss of either—eh, *Mariechen?*"

"If anything were to be wrong in the will they could take her away."

"Take her away!"—horrified. "Nonsense, she is ours, yours and mine. Quite impossible. Minnie! What, Minnie, my *Mädchen*. Where are you, my little English rose? You are not going to leave me, are you?" He picked her up and kissed her. She was just a charming age. "You love me, darling?"

"As much as *that*," said she, holding her arms to the widest extent, "one time, two times, three times as much more."

"My *Blümchen!* Make your mind quite easy, Molly, they shall never have her. I am not prospective king of this country for nothing."

But a week later the blow fell. "Lord Henry Seymour would be glad to have the person of his niece, the honourable Mary Seymour, handed over to him at Mrs Fitzherbert's earliest convenience, as he does not approve of her being under the direction and control of one professing the Roman Catholic faith. Lord Henry's co-trustee entirely coincides with his views."

Maria wrote in return and said that she would be glad to know Lord Henry's authority for removing his niece, and requested to see a copy of the will. This she was speedily furnished with. It had been written before Lord Hugh left England and before the birth of the child, in it his brother, Lord Henry, was appointed executor conjointly with Lord Euston.

Some months before his death, in fact on the death of Minnie's mother, she had written and implored him to give her some legal hold on the child, and he had answered that he was contemplating a will in which she was to be sole guardian—this, apparently, he had never drawn up.

Lord Henry based his claim on the fact that the child, being an orphan and without a guardian, he, her uncle, and her father's principal executor, had before anyone else most claim to the child's custody.

Maria, who was much frightened, applied to that rising young K.C., Samuel Romilly, with whom she was acquainted.

"My dear Madam," said he, "if I were you I should fight it out. The child has no legal guardian, and the court will appoint one. As the mother left her in your charge, I see no earthly reason why you should not be chosen. Try and settle the matter amicably at first, though; don't be belligerent until he is. Write and ask him to let you have her."

So Maria wrote a conciliatory letter to Lord Henry and

asked him to give her the care of the child, as she had had her so long, and her mother had evidently considered her to be a suitable person.

Lord Henry said in reply that he could not possibly accede to this request, and he repeated that he wished to receive the child under his roof as soon as possible.

Instructed by Romilly, Maria declined to hand over the little girl until Lord Henry could produce legal authority compelling her to do so.

Lord Henry then appealed to the Court of Chancery to name a guardian for his niece. The matter came before the Master of the Rolls and was unfavourable to Mrs Fitzherbert. In summing up, he said that while he fully acknowledged the high character and blameless reputation borne by Mrs Maria Fitzherbert, he could not consider that she was a suitable person to have the upbringing and education of a Protestant child, especially when her own relations were willing and anxious to take charge of her, therefore, he directed and ordered that Mrs Maria Fitzherbert was to hand over the person of the Honourable Mary Georgiana Emma Seymour to the care of her paternal uncle, Lord Henry Seymour, whom the Court would appoint in due course her guardian.

Romilly gave notice of appeal, and the case was referred directly to the Lord Chancellor (Eldon) who, after a tedious hearing, confirmed the decree of the Master.

But all this took time, and shortly after Lord Eldon's decree he was thrown out of office, for on January 24, 1806, Pitt died. The immediate result of this was the ushering in of the Ministry of "all the talents," the "broad-bottomed" Ministry of which Lord Grenville was the nominal head, and Fox, after twenty-two years, returned to office as Foreign Secretary. All this time the Whig power had been gradually increasing, and what strengthened them so much was the unreasonableness of the King, and through him Mr Pitt, on the Catholic question as well as on the Slave Trade. The Whigs of 1805 were in a very different position from what they were in '92, when Thurlow said, "There are but forty of them, but there is not one of them who is not ready to be hanged for Fox." Unfortunately, they were

now divided into the Foxites, who were genuine Whigs, and the Grenvillites, who had Tory leanings. This was to cause their downfall in the end. At the moment, however, the King had to stomach his pride and accept the obnoxious Fox, and it seemed as though the Prince's fortunes had at last turned.

Writing to her son, Augustus, at Washington, Lady Elizabeth Foster all through the following month of February sounds the jubilant note of triumph. There is also in the same collection of letters one from the Duchess of Devonshire herself, speaking of the Foreign Secretary's decent respect for his rival's memory. "People have done me the honour to call me that Right Honourable gentleman's rival, and a great honour it was."

Oh, generous, noble soul, too soon was there bitterness, too soon alloy, for on March 13, just over three months after Pitt died, the *grand dame* whose prime was the greatest and most dignified, the most characteristic of the eighteenth century, also passed away. On that ill-omened day, in the presence of her beloved sister, Lady Bessborough, and her life-long friend, Lady Elizabeth, whilst still in the flower of her comeliness, Georgiana, the beautiful Duchess, ceased to exist!

The Prince of Wales when he heard it, said, "Then the best-natured and best-bred woman in England is gone." It seems as though she waited all those years to see Whig power again, to see "the Man of the People" once more triumphant. And then satisfied, she died. It is long, long ago now, and yet for the instant, without affectation, one can say one feels the echo of a sorrow. And the world went on as it does to-day, just as the fire burns, unheeding the little lives of each separate coal that go to make it what it is.

There was a very great scandal that year concerning the Princess, and indirectly the Prince of Wales, whom the gossip-mongers had long given up in dispair of ever furnishing further work to their prating tongues.

While the Prince and Maria hung on tenter-hooks over the ultimate fate of Minnie, came extraordinary news that the behaviour of the Princess of Wales was so very indis-

creet as to merit great censure from everyone. The Princess had indeed made one of her violent friendships, shortly after she went to reside at Blackheath, with a Lady Douglas, and now she had quarrelled with her. Lady Douglas, who seems to have been a weak, hysterical person, went about narrating her woes, and other things, with the result that it came to the ears of the King and the Prince, and the country at large, that the Princess of Wales had been delivered of a son!

In this story the truth has to be told, and so I will not depart from my habit, but tell it in this particular case as in others. The Prince was delighted. He saw visions of a divorce and a near breaking of the chain that had always galled him, and so firmly did he get the notion implanted in his brain that he never ridded himself of it again until her death. To be free! that was then his one thought.

An inquiry was held into the behaviour of the Princess. All her servants and all her friends were rigidly examined by Lord Erskine, the Chancellor, Lord Grenville, Lord Spencer, and Lord Ellenborough, the Chief Justice. These individuals found her, after a lengthy interval, innocent, and the child who had given cause for so much talk, they were "perfectly convinced" to be the son of Sophia Austin. The truth was that the Princess, deprived of her own child, had adopted (or bought) the little boy of a few days old, and, coupled with her wild behaviour and the reckless, foolish things she said, one can understand how the talk, carefully fostered by her enemies, had arisen.

To prove his satisfaction at this verdict, the King presented the Princess with two Arabian horses and an "elegant service of gold," at the same time making her Ranger of Greenwich Park.

But the Prince and his friends were not satisfied, or, at least, they expressed themselves unconvinced at this decision, and there was a sort of second inquiry held later, which, considering all, was most foolish and most futile.

Meanwhile, the trouble about Minnie was to come before the new Chancellor, Lord Erskine, who was a great friend of the Prince, and who, years before, had been his Attorney-General. To secure the end he so ardently

desired, the Prince had a personal interview with the "wicked uncle," as Miss Minnie was rapidly beginning to dub him in her active little brain. "You shall never regret it, believe me," he said straightforwardly, "if you will oblige me in this one thing. I am not in the habit of imploring favours, forgive me, therefore, if I do it awkwardly."

"I do not see my way to oblige your Royal Highness; I must respectfully refuse," Lord Henry stubbornly informed him.

"The child is nothing to you," the Prince persisted. "In a dozen of the same age you could hardly pick her out, but we have had her since her birth, to me she has taken the place of my daughter, the Princess Charlotte, whom his Majesty desires to have under his own care. I entreat of you, Lord Henry, to revoke you decision."

"I do not wish the child to be brought up a Papist, your Royal Highness, and, what is more, I *will* not have her so brought up."

The irritable movement of the Prince's foot alone betrayed his impatience. "Then make me the guardian and I will settle ten thousand on her."

"Impossible, Sir."

"You will do nothing?"

"I must respectfully refuse to abandon my just claim."

"Very good. Now I know. I shall fight this matter out to the last, understand that; I shall leave no stone unturned."

"The child must be handed to me next week, your Royal Highness, and the person who is now detaining her—"

"Mrs Fitzherbert, if you please, my Lord."

"Ah, yes, Mrs Fitzherbert, I shall force into delivering her up, if I have to call in the assistance of a constable."

"Then I need not detain you any further, my Lord."

And, at this, Lord Henry departed victorious.

"Minnie wants a birthday next week, and Minnie wants a baby-house," cried the young lady, flying with bare feet to meet the Prince at nine o'clock that night.

"Silly girl, you can't have a birthday for the ordering," he exclaimed, laughing.

"You can do everything, you can make it birthday,"

asserted the maiden confidently, clasping his hand tightly with her two small ones against her little breast.

"*Ach, mein geliebtes Kind*, would that I could!"

"Minnie must really go to bed," said Mrs Fitzherbert, who came into the room. "She has been waiting for you all day to communicate some fine scheme, and although she was undressed an hour and a half ago, up till now she has been far too excited to sleep."

"Don't want to go, Prinny, don't let her take me away," pleaded the child, bringing all the wiles she was capable of to bear on him.

"George, tell her she must obey me."

"Let her be, heart's dearest. It will only be for one more week."

"You have seen him?"

The Prince nodded. "And he has refused," he concluded.

With unconscious care, she brought a shawl to wrap about the child. He held her by the elbows and then passed his arm round her again, for she was on his knee.

"I'm to have the birthday?" she entreated, lifting up a very red, very pursed-up mouth for him to kiss.

"Yes, little sunshine," he said, "you shall have the birthday." She nestled her head against him and presently fell asleep.

"Dear, what is to be done? Oh, I *cannot* lose her; I cannot bear it."

"No, begad, nor I. It's deuced hard. I am deprived of my own child whilst every other father in the kingdom has lawful possession of his own flesh and blood, and now this poor little orphan wretch has insinuated herself into my heart and has stolen all the love and tenderness that rightfully belongs to little Char, and that any man of delicate and refined feeling must experience; I am to be robbed of her too."

"You are right," said Maria, "'tis hardest on you." The tears came to her eyes in pity for him.

"Ay, *Geliebte*, I think it is. You are so unsusceptible and I feel so much more."

She agreed, for he had said this so often, she had grown to believe it.

"Molly, you must appeal again. I will speak to Erskine, I will *order* him."

"He is the King's Chancellor, not yours."

"True. But it will come before the Lords if there is a division—I must move heaven and earth."

"Already I have done everything. I have written twice to Lady Hertford."

"Lady Hertford?"

"I used to know her very well when she was Frances Cornewell. I had hoped to see her personally, but she has been out of town, and, matters getting desperate, I have been compelled to write. I have implored her in both my letters to entreat of Lord Hertford to give me my child on any terms, with any restrictions, only to let me keep her."

"By Jove, Moll, that's smart. But how has he power?"

"As head of his house, he must have influence, and I think Frances will do all she can, she is a woman, she will understand and pity me—us."

"When do you expect to hear?"

"I have heard—a most kind letter. She arrived in town to-day and, as she is only passing through, her house is all shut up, and she says, therefore, that she will call on me to-morrow morning. I have tried not to bolster myself up—yet say you think it sounds hopeful."

"It does—indeed, it does," he said warmly. "It was most clever of you, dear. I will be here myself without fail and see her with you, Molly."

At eleven o'clock the next morning Lady Hertford arrived. In age she was nearer forty than thirty and had married Lord Hertford in '98. She shook hands with Maria and then kissed her, curtsied respectfully to the Prince, and after that she settled herself with a business-like air to listen to the story.

"You see," explained Maria, "I have grown so fond of her, she is like my own child, I cannot bear to lose her."

"We can neither of us bear to lose her," corrected the Prince.

"I perfectly understand, Sir. I know how I should feel myself. I sincerely sympathise both with you and my amiable old friend Mrs Fitzherbert."

Maria then told her how inflexible Lord Henry was.

"Yes," said Lady Hertford, "I know him of old. He is as obstinate as a mule. Now the question is, how can I help you? The Chancellor can't revoke the decision, Mary—you must let me call you Mary for the sake of our mutual girlhood—because of the King's prejudice against this religion you have joined. What a pity you ever did!"

"Indeed, Madam, you endorse my own opinion," said the Prince, fervently.

"No, the Chancellor certainly cannot give the child to you—it would be against his own interest. There remains then but Henry, unless a third, my husband, intervenes."

"But will he do it?" asked Maria.

"Why should he not?" asked Lady Hertford. "Why in the world should he not? He is the proper person, the head of the house, a married man, the most suitable in every way. The Chancellor can give the child to him without any qualms of conscience, and, of course, Mary, we can hand her immediately over to you."

"And, Lady Hertford, you really think you can persuade your husband to do this?"

"I am convinced, Sir, he will feel deeply the unexpected privilege of rendering so slight a service to your Highness."

"An invaluable service, Madam," contradicted the Prince.

"Sir, that will make it an honour and a pleasure more than priceless; I know it." At this his Highness executed a perfect bow. "And shall I tell you a secret? There is no love lost between my husband and his brother—in fact, I fear he will take an unchristian delight in his discomfiture. Also, through pleasing my dear old friend Mary, he will please me." But she said this as an afterthought.

Presently, with renewed promises and assurances, she betook herself off.

"What a charming woman, what a delightful manner," said the Prince, returning from handing her to her coach.

"How she has degenerated," said Maria, simultaneously with him.

"You are always pettishly vindictive and derogatory where the attractive of your own sex are concerned," he returned violently.

"Dear heart, you are right. Let me have nothing but good to say of this woman who assures our Minnie to us."

CHAPTER XXXIV

VIVE, VALE!

"Because she
Already was a wife, and he who loved
Was her own husband's dear, familiar friend."

AND so it came about. Lord Chancellor Erskine revoked the ruling of his predecessor and made Lord Hertford the guardian, and Lord Hertford handed Miss Minnie over on paper to Maria, for actually she never left that lady's roof for an hour, "subject to certain conditions as to its education." One can imagine these to relate to religion, and so the matter presumably ended, but the stone that is thrown in the water and causes ever-widening circles can be well applied as a simile here. Trouble black and bitter was to come out of Minnie's restoration to her foster parents. What an unfortunate period it then was, the twelve months from October '05 to October '06. In October the death of Nelson, in January that of Pitt, and in March the Duchess of Devonshire and the Prince's trusted friend, Captain Payne. On September the 6th, at Brighton, Lord Thurlow; his last words were quaint: "I'm shot if I don't believe I'm dying!" he exclaimed, astonished, and never spoke again. And on September the 13th came a loss as great as that of Nelson—a loss to the people, a loss to the country, and to the Prince the loss of a friend of thirty years' standing, for on that memorable day died the great English statesman, Charles Fox.

He was great. We may condemn his Radical principles, we may deplore his early profligacy, yet we must admire his sweet, kind, generous nature, his unswerving, unrelaxing persistency, his unwavering loyalty to advance the causes

he thought were for our good. Yes, our good; we are the posterity he worked for and gave all his life for.

We do him scanty justice now. His talents were as great as Pitt's; he had a magical power, that the Imperialist entirely lacked, to carry men with him; he was ten years older, and so had ten years the start. Had he stayed a Tory of the Tories, as he was when he entered the House, and not made his abrupt change so soon, where might he not have ended? But he gave it all up, the flattery, the confidence of the King, everything one would think a man would value, to be true to his ideals—those ideals he lived, worked, suffered and died for. It is true, indeed, that for them he died. There is no more pitiful picture — I should say there is no more glorious picture—of self-abnegation than that of Fox leaving the invalid chair that the last six months of his life were spent in, to go down to the House, old, broken and worn, to move a preliminary resolution on the introduction of a bill to abolish the Slave Trade—a measure that had always had his favour—for the last time.

In the farewell speech that he made that day, he said: "So fully am I impressed with the vast importance and necessity of obtaining what will be the object of my motion this night, that if, during the almost forty years that I have had the honour of a seat in Parliament, I had been so fortunate as to accomplish that, and that only, I should think I had done enough, and could retire from public life with comfort and the conscious satisfaction that I had done my duty."

Freedom! It is a great word, and a great man lived his life of fifty-eight years for it and it alone.

We like to realise that in the following year the emancipation was established of slaves in the British Dominions. The "annual blister" of our days is the deceased wife's sister trouble, and the one of those that was then to drag so weary a time was the Catholic Relief.

Now, although the King, when Pitt died in January, was compelled to come to terms with Fox, this was a subject that they could not agree upon at all, nor did they until the end, which was soon after. The sceptre his rival had laid

down was all too heavy for his languid hand, though he made a gallant struggle that spring, and during his last weeks he was engaged in encouraging and directing in reference to the Catholic Bill; but he grew rapidly worse. The summer waned, and, alas! so did he. He watched the burgeoning and blossoming of his sweet, beloved flowers for the last time, he tended, watched and watered till he grew too weak, and then he would direct Mrs Fox from his chair how to restrain his creepers from too wilfully wandering, how to tie up his roses when their heavy, perfumed heads dragged on the parent branch too weightily.

The Prince was at Brighton when the news came that Fox was really again in danger, and he made on receipt of it one of his flying all-night journeys. It was the last time he saw his friend.

A good deal of nonsense—shameless, idiotic nonsense—has been written about the Prince and Mr Fox. The only idea of the biographer treating of the early life of the Prince is to slander and abuse the statesman and put the blame of all those youthful peccadilloes on his shoulders, as the fruit of his evil example. And, on the other hand, the few—the too few—that have treated, adequately or inadequately, of Mr Fox, disclaim their responsibility of explaining his irregular life and habits by heaping insults on the Prince. "It was that wicked, profligate young man," they say. "It was he who led poor Fox from the path of virtue. Naturally, his head was turned by the Royal attentions (Fox, the Radical!) and so he fell into the snare and acquired his fatal passion for gambling in the wild, disgraceful, abandoned orgies of Carlton House."

The Prince was detained in town, and it was noon before he reached St Ann's Hill. It was one of her husband's bad days, Mrs Fox said when she received him; she did not expect him to get up all day. Then she preceded him to Fox's room. He had visitors already. The imposing Lady Elizabeth Foster from Chiswick and his well-beloved nephew, Lord Holland. The Prince begged that these would not retire. "Business and pleasure, Sir, you see," said Fox, with a faint smile, for on the bed lay some notes about the Catholic Bill and a list of hardy annuals.

Vive, Vale!

Oh, the difference! it was pitiful, it was heart-rending. He was wasted to a shadow, his thick, black, clustering hair was flecked with silver as sea foam flecks the water. A whitening beard hid his soft, voluptuous chin and his kindly, firm, incisive mouth. Only his stormy eyes were the same, mystic, inscrutable, flashing anon at some chance word with something of their old fire, as when they had darted the flame of vehement wrath on the writhing, restless Tory Ministers, and the great, black, shaggy, overhanging brows, the joy of the caricaturist, were unchanged. The Prince walked to the window and looked out after the first greeting. Always sensitive, the change so complete, in so short a time, affected him very greatly. He stood and bit his lips, staring at a climbing rose that completely surrounded the window.

Presently Lady Elizabeth rose to go, and Lord Holland accompanied her, after she had taken her leave, to hand her to her carriage. He was staying in the house.

"Charles, dear old fellow, this is a very fine rose you have here."

"*Rosa bracteata*," said Mr Fox.

"But it is much better trained lower down. You must get better, and then you can train this part of the tree too."

"No, Sir. When I leave here, my presence will be required in 'another place,'" objected the invalid, with a little quizzical laugh.

"Charles, old man."

A low, smothered sob. Mrs Fox, after bringing the Prince in, had ensconced herself, like a dog, at her husband s side. Half raising himself, Mr Fox drew back the bed curtain on the most obscure side, and discovered her kneeling there, all huddled up.

"Liz!" he exclaimed. "Why, Liz, you should not be there, my girl. Why did you not see Lady Elizabeth off?"

Mrs Fox only sniffed miserably and dabbed her face with a damp ball of handkerchief.

"Well, go now and keep the Young 'Un company a while, there's a kind, dear soul. His Highness and I want to talk a little while together." The Young 'Un was his invariable designation for Lord Holland.

"The doctor will be here soon, Carl," was all the lady vouchsafed.

"Do not send him away then, Madam," said George. "Our confabulation will not last long, for I must not tire your husband."

"Go now, there's a good wench." And Mrs Fox, standing up, very reluctantly withdrew.

"Dear Liz," said Fox, looking after her affectionately, "dear, faithful, loving girl. How much I have had to be thankful for!"

"You married her after all," said the Prince. "I never thought you would, when I used to go down to South Street night after night, when Mrs Fitz. was in Holland."

For this lady had been the "notorious Mrs Armistead," and the sharer of Fox's joys and sorrows for over twelve years before he married her in '95.

Fox lay still looking with his dark, unfathomable eyes at the recently closed door. "Poor Liz," he said. "A man cannot satisfy himself all his life with impossible dreams, you know, Sir"—turning with his own tender, bright smile to the Prince now standing beside the bed.

"Sir?" queried the latter, half raising his eyebrows, with slight admonition.

"Ay, you are right," said Fox, "death levels everything, and love too, so the poets tell us. And so, George, you have forgotten rank and everything and come all the way here to see an old friend who lies dying. It is very kind of you: I thank you and feel it deeply."

He held out his hand, and the Prince took it in silence, and neither spoke for a moment or two.

Fox broke this silence with some details of his illness.

"But you have been better again up till this last week," objected the Prince; "you may be well yet."

Fox shook his head. "The lulls in the pain were in reality due to the disease from which he suffered gathering fresh force and making room for a new attack," he said. "Oh, I do not mind now, Sir, though it seemed a bit of a wrench when I first realised it, having only just come to my own. But I suppose I was not to stay long after Pitt, poor old Pitt! It has seemed to me since he went as though

there was something missing in the world. If I run into him after my death—I suppose I shall run into him, that is, if I am to have a seat in the upper house, he is certain to be there, I cannot imagine him anywhere else; he is so respectable."

"Don't, Charles, don't."

"Then there is Burke, he is someone else for me to meet," meditated the other—the original train of thought perverted—pulling at his long churchwarden. "Ah, he is a friend tried and true is Burke. I shall never forget when I met him at the back of the throne after he broke with me when that worthless young scamp, his son, Dick died—"

"I wish I'd been to see you before," interrupted the Prince, fuming, "or had known you were so bad as this. Anyhow, a fresh face would cheer you up, old man. Do you think it would do you any good to go to Brighton? I would lend you the Pavilion or Steyne House."

Fox shook his head.

"The change of scene might do you good."

"I shall have a complete change soon, Sir," he said, unconsciously dropping back into the life-long habit.

"It's this infernal Catholic question that is killing you, Charles. Damn it all! why worry about the Irish pigs, why not let them go to perdition the own way?"

"Not through Parliament?" queried Fox, "of course, that is a certain way, I know. But they are not all Irish, George."

"No," said George, and kicked the carpet with the toe of his boot. "Wherever I go the question is dinned in my ears, hang it! Tilney Street thinks of nothing else."

"And how is—Tilney Street?" asked Fox.

"Well and hearty, thank you. You know the little lady, Miss Mary Georgiana Emma, is quite reinstated."

"So?" said Fox. "A pretty, bright little maiden; I am fond of children."

"Yes, a child about the place, if you don't see too much of it, is a pleasant toy. I wish Moll had had some of her own, but, perhaps, it is as well, there would only have been trouble about succession." He looked at Fox and Fox looked at him, and his whole face flushed, for both remembered the 30th of April in '87.

"As it is," said Mr Fox, turning slowly on to his back to give him time to recover, "you have Mary Georgiana, a very happy combination." His eyes wandered over the ceiling contentedly. "Mary Georgiana should atone for everything — my mother's first name was Georgiana," he mused reflectively.

"And also—" began the Prince, and then stopped.

"And also it was the name of somebody else," finished the dying man. "Georgiana was the name of the dearest friend I ever had. Ay, lad, the best friend. Friend she was to me for thirty years, and in my eyes always as beautiful as the day I first saw her newly a bride. Do you remember the Westminster election—the second one?" he asked, with his thoughts in the past.

"And there was a report you were killed?" said the Prince in a sudden flash of intuitive memory.

Fox nodded. "Once a friend always a friend, through thick and thin, up and down, light and shade. When is the 30th?"

"On Saturday," said the Prince.

"Then it will be just six months since that pretty red head, that dainty, refined, gracious personality was hidden from us all under the coffin lid. My dearest, loving, faithful friend who was just that, and that alone, to me, because nothing else was possible."

"Poor Liz!" said George.

"She does not know, besides, there is nothing to know, Sir," said Fox. "A man does not live on his wild dreams, as I said just now, any more than he is in the lofty mood he reaches sometimes when he prays—I fear I have prayed seldom enough. Still, one has such moments—sometimes. I am glad she died first, though the world seemed suddenly queer when she left it. Still, I'm glad now."

"Charles, Charles, I am your friend too!"

"Indeed you are, Sir. I thank Heaven I die with many dear friends, and I think very few men have been blessed with so much in this world as I, or die so content. True, I have lived life, but in the House I have always tried to do my duty, I have a good wife who is provided for at my death, I leave a successor in the Young 'Un who I have tried to

teach what a good Whig should be, I leave a future king whose motto has always been 'advance.' I think few men die more blessed and happy than I. It shall always remain advance, Sir?"

"Indeed it shall, Charles. No one will ever see me turn Tory."

"And when you come into power, if they are not free by then, don't thwart the Irish pigs—live and let live, Sir, is another excellent distich."

"It has always been a favourite of yours, Charles, for black and white."

"Oh, the slave trade. Yes, I should have liked to have lived to have seen that stain really obliterated. Never mind, I leave everything with the Young 'Un."

"Dr Vaughan is coming up the path," said Mrs Fox, outside.

"I will return," whispered the Prince, hurriedly, "tomorrow if possible."

"Oh, ay. Whenever you can," said Mr Fox, warmly, pressing his hand. "Whenever you can."

"Good-bye, dear old fellow, good-bye. Keep up your courage, we shall have you on a step-ladder yet, doing wonders to that rose."

Fox smiled. "Good-bye, George, and God bless you, old chap," he said. "Remember always that it is not '*Dieu et mon droit*' with you, it must be '*Dieu et mes gens.*'"

CHAPTER XXXV

A SECOND CASE OF A FALSE FRIEND

"He is so easily led off—any face if it is fresh—any fool with bright eyes."

MARIA was paying one of her very rare visits to Carlton House. She was sitting in a room that contained an enormous desk, and an imposing litter of papers was scattered over it and on the floor.

"You really should not come here," objected the master of the establishment, drumming his fingers on the desk top. "It will make people talk so, really it is hardly—"

"Proper?" she suggested, with a mirthless little laugh.

"'Tis a suitable word."

She laughed again.

"What do you want, what have you come for?" he inquired.

"To ask you why you gave my Indian shawl to Lady Hertford?"

"Oh, you have found that out? Gad's life, I can give it to whom I choose, can't I? What's yours is mine. I will buy you another and a finer one."

"But I do not know what you gave it her for. When I told you last week that I had mislaid it, you expressed the utmost concern, you declared that I had not worn it for some time and suggested my maid as a possible thief, when no doubt you remembered as well as I did that until the weather turned suddenly cold in the early part of last month it was constantly round my shoulders. As for buying me another one, it's absurd—I want my own. I know the pattern was rather vivid, and I don't believe you could get one like it in this country, it was so fine you could pass it

through a wedding-ring. Besides, it was my mother's, it was brought over specially for her by my uncle as a wedding present, and I want it back again."

"Pray spare me any more family history. I have given it to Lady Hertford; you can hardly be so mean as to ask her for it back."

"Why did you not ask me for it? I was never so astounded in all my life as when I saw her flaunting in it last night. I should not have known it was her, but I recognised one of her footmen, she was so muffled up—people will be taking her for me next."

"I would explain, only you are always so confoundedly jealous."

"Say on."

"Lady Hertford is a good friend to me. I would seek her advice, and she is kind enough to offer to aid me with her counsel."

"Well?"

"Well," he repeated uncertainly, finding the monosyllables mightily disconcerting. "Well, naturally, she is tenacious of her reputation, people are so unjustly censorious. There is no harm in her being my friend, if we are careful, say in her wearing your shawl—"

"So as to be taken for me?"

"Ye-es, there can be no scandal. Such a thing would be loathsome to her delicate, refined mind, and would cause her to abhor me."

"What a catastrophe!"

"Don't sneer, Moll, it makes you look so old."

"What does her delicate and refined mind think of me?"

"Don't be vulgar and middle-class."

"Not at all, I was only repeating your words; besides, I *am* middle-class."

"You ought to have shaken off such mannerisms long ago," he said seriously, "having constantly associated with me. Lady Hertford does not blame you, nor does she blame me, she is only sorry for us both. And that reminds me, she is going to dine with you to-morrow night; after some persuasion, she has consented to waive all formality,

for I told her that your house was my house, heart's dearest, and my real home, so write her a nice little note when you get home." He came across to her and put his hand on her shoulder. "If only you would give and take—more like other men's wives."

"Unfortunately, I am placed differently, dear, to other men's wives. My life is one long struggle to retain my dignity and self-respect, and from you I get neither encouragement nor sympathy, I never have. You do not understand."

"You are very ungrateful!" he exclaimed indignantly. For the last week I have been carrying this about to give you"—he threw something on to the table that clinked, she reached out her hand, it was neither money nor jewellery, but a bunch of three keys of curious workmanship. "They are the keys of my new secret passage at Brighton," he explained. "There are only three sets extant—one for you, one for me, and one to be kept for fear of a loss."

She thanked him without enthusiasm.

"And you will write, like a good girl?"

"Hark! what is that?"she interrupted

"It means that they are in sight," said the Prince.

"Pom-pom-pom!" It was the Dead March from "Saul," and the players were stationed on the quaint, gilded, latticed-in terrace that was such a landmark to our grandfathers. For that day was October 10, and the day of Fox's funeral.

Without, since early morning, black-clad crowds had been assembling, all the poor and needy were coming forth to pay a last respect to their champion.

"Pom-pom-pom!" It was the only testimony of affection that the Prince could pay to the memory of his friend, for the King had taken the trouble to specially interdict his son appearing as a mourner, as he so wished to do, but he could not prevent him from donning black. The solemn hush that was suddenly, by some occult reason, felt by those in the room would have told them that the last procession of the poor "Man of the People," the man who, as Burke said, was made to be loved, was passing, followed by Lord

Holland, the Duke of Devonshire, and half-a-score of others, without the warning note from the band.

"Come to the window," said the Prince, abruptly. In silence they watched the long, sad file wind slowly to the right in the pale October sunshine. The coffin they could not see, it was hidden under the nodding plumes and the black velvet of the ancient hearse, but as the dark, cumbersome thing rolled by the people silently wept.

"Pom-pom-pom!" The long stream of mourners that had started from Chiswick, for he had died rather suddenly at the Duke of Devonshire's villa, passed on like a ghostly, impalpable vision, and the crowd, which was rapidly increasing, followed silently.

Maria turned from the window. "He is dead, poor man," she said. "Eighteen years ago he did me so great an injury that it is only now I can say I honestly forgive him. He must have had his good qualities, since so many loved him."

"He never harmed you in his life, Molly," said the Prince.

"You may have seen no wrong, but I did," she said coldly.

"Pooh! you make such a mountain out of a molehill, or I should have told you long ago. Charles honestly believed 'the blessing of God,' as you would call it, had been dispensed with in our union. I told him so myself."

"Oh! then," she cried, like one who is sore wounded, "'twas your denial."

"Yes, if you like to put it that way, it *was* my denial. Well, don't forget to write Lady Hertford. You can find your way out, I suppose? By-by, see you to-morrow night. I must go, have had a man waiting for me ever so long now."

Having locked his desk, he slipped the keys into his pocket, and, with a cursory nod, quitted the room.

In Westminster Abbey her lifelong enemy was even then being laid to rest. "Oh, if only he had told me sooner!" she sobbed, "and on any other day than this. My last illusion, I think, is gone; and oh, how great and noble must

have been the breast that all those long years could have kept such a secret in silence, have born my unwavering rudeness and all my jibes and sneers rather than betray a worthless friend!"

But a little while after this, we find Lady Elizabeth Foster writing the following piece of interesting information to her son Augustus. "The Prince has given up politics, is good friends with the King, and lives but for Lady Hertford. *C'est vrai, je t'assure à 50 ans près, elle a captivé le Prince. Il ne vit ne respire que pour elle et par elle; la ci-devant amie est inquiète est triste. Je la plains car c'est une bonne personne qui n'a jamais abusé de son pouvoir.*"

The Ministry of all the Talents fell soon after the death of Fox, for he was its prop, support and backbone, and without him it would never have existed.

On the fall of the "Talents," the country was blessed by another Tory Government, of which the shining ornaments were all enthusiastic champions of the Princess of Wales, whose wilful daughter was now growing to be a tall girl at Windsor, under the strict *régime* of the disagreeble Queen and her vinegary maiden aunts.

But although the Princess was now, since the investigation into her conduct, in better circumstances than before, and though she kept a certain amount of her position up, under the patronage and the warm friendship and encouragement of the King, never by night or day was the idea of a divorce wholly absent from her august consort's mind, and, I regret to say, his new friend encouraged him in what was to prove a vain dream. Do not imagine he had broken with Maria—oh, dear, no. Only it was "Lady Hertford this and Lady Hertford that," until she found that she was absolutely expected to chaperon this careful person and accompany her constantly to public places, so as it might appear that they were the dearest friends, and thus give the lie direct to calumnious tongues that wagged sceptically over the suggestion of a "platonic" attachment. And when Maria would have refused, he threatened, unless he was obeyed, to remove the child. It was strange that the rising star should give the advice to him that her predecessor had

done fifteen years years before. "Get rid of the Papist," my Lady Jersey had whispered, "and you regain the trust of the people and of Parliament, and so get your debts paid."

Lady Hertford's reason was now even more alluring to him. "Get rid of the Papist," she said. "If you do not, it will be always dragged up against you, and you will never get your divorce." For his hatred of the Princess was rapidly becoming a monomania. I think he was jealous of the superior influence she exerted over the little Charlotte.

Those were great and stirring times for England, while two-thirds of Europe bowed submissively to the iron rod of one man, and she unbendingly defied him. Night after night, on the top of the Sussex hills, on Black Cap, Ditchling Beacon and Woolstonbury, a bon-fire was always ready for kindling, to warn the country round should the dreaded French attempt to land; but the Prince took no heed. now of politics or of military matters, his once ardent interest in all things of that kind had paled, and was dying. Voluptuous living, interest in the petty details of useless extravagances, exaggerated clothing, and, most of all, the foolish over-decorating and unceasing rebuilding to which he devoted his life during the Regency period gaining for him the unenviable reputation he bears to this day, were fast becoming his sole interests. Whilst everyone else watched the giant strides and masterly inactivity of Wellington, Metternich, Sir John Moore and Blucher, playing the great game for the salvation of their respective countries, the fit of a coat or any other article of clothing, or, it may be, some new design of that under-bred idiot, George Brummel, occupied all his attention. That a middle-aged man should waste the experienced, mature, yet virile years of his life in puerile fripperies, when all about him great and momentous events were taking place daily, in all of which, to a certain extent, he might have had an active share, are incontestable facts that cannot be too deeply deplored. Let us drop a veil over this period. We have known the Prince in his youth and health, in all the beauty of his young strength—the picture is not pretty now, so let us turn from contemplating it further.

In the Shadow of the Purple

What need to dwell on the four and a half years that intervened? Let me hasten to the time when his day of power dawned, and the King, his father, was pronounced hopelessly insane.

In 1764, in 1788, and in 1801, he had attacks of the illness that was to afflict him permanently from 1810 until his death.

There were the old alarms, excursions, intrigues, contradictory reports, and family quarrels, little manœuvres, petty discoveries, and agitating tea-cup storms, and the end of it all was, that on the 5th of February 1811, the Prince was sworn in as Regent.

The care of the King, according to the precedent of 1788, was reposed with the Queen, and the Prince was submitted to all the restrictions that were then proposed. They were to be in force two years, and if his Majesty were no better they were to lapse at the end of that period.

Knowing the objection that had been made to the active part he took in the preliminaries of the Regency arrangements of '88, he at first, this time, stood passive, in hopes of getting a freer hand granted him, but the Tory government were not to be thus hoodwinked, and they sought to hamper him in every possible way. In despair he went to the Whig Opposition (who were in frenzied haste to stop the war), and scarcely was he in touch with them than their two great powers, Lord Grey and Lord Grenville (Lords G. and G.), began to quarrel with Sheridan, for the moment the *vis a tergo* of all the Prince's actions.

Disappointed here too, he was in a state of glorious uncertainty whether or not to dismiss his Ministers, when his power did come. He changed his mind a dozen times a day; he consulted everyone he met; he was swayed by every breath.

Lady Hertford advised him most strenuously to retain his Ministers. "Think, Sir," she said, "do you dismiss them, and his Majesty recovers, what an uproar and confusion there will be." The Queen also implored of him to stay his hand, for she said, did the King recover to find the change, it was quite possible it would bring on such a paroxysm as might endanger his very life.

A Second Case of a False Friend

At about this time, Maria, who was living at Brighthelmstone with the child that had cost her so much, received an urgent summons from Carlton House, so she went up to town as she was ordered to do. Although there was no break between her and the Prince, their estrangement was every day now becoming greater. She had not seen him for three months or more. Since Fox's death, she passed through a trying and miserable time, "which at last, almost," as she said, "ruined her health, and destroyed her nerves. Attentions were required from her towards Lady Hertford herself, even when she was most aware of her superior influence over the Prince."

The foregoing are the words of Lord Stourton, and put the case in a nutshell. He would not hear of her leaving him. "Let me go," she would say; "my day is over, you want me no more."

And at this he would weep, and implore, and profess penitence, and make promises that he never fulfilled, till her soul was sick with miserable pity and shame, to see how poor, how small, was the creature she had loved, and had deemed once, save for a few venial failings, well-nigh perfect. How paltry ever is the shattered idol!

She obeyed his commands now, and presented herself at Carlton House. This was in January, and the Regency was still in the bud. However, imagine her astonishment to find a bad attempt at state being kept up, and the room full of gentlemen and attendants.

"Madam," he said formally, rising to meet her, "I must thank you most deeply for obliging me so promptly." He handed her gracefully to a chair. "I am anxious to obtain your valuable advice upon an urgent political crisis."

"The poor assistance I can render you is always at your Royal Highness's disposal," she returned, with dignity, and she was surprised to find how calm and collected she felt.

"I feel convinced of your generosity in that respect, Madam," he returned, "and it grieves me more than words can tell that, in the future, I shall be compelled to forego your assistance, through many circumstances over which, alas, I have no control. I request you now on this occasion to speak freely and give me your true, unreserved opinion."

He then asked her whether she would advise him to continue in office, or dismiss the Tory government, and he mentioned some of the arguments that had been used to him in favour of the former course.

"'Tis hard to dismiss them, regarding it in that light, Sir. Your position is a most painful one, but dismiss them you must; if you favour them, you dub yourself turncoat at the beginning of your reign. You have been a Whig all your life, Sir; your engagements with that party are innumerable, and you cannot shirk them, for your honour is at stake."

"I cannot take your advice," he said. "It is impossible; I have promised."

"Sir!" She rose to her feet. "They have fought all your battles these thirty years, and you promised Mr Fox."

He shook his head slowly. "I have promised," he repeated.

There were quite twenty people in the room, there was a man at the table scratching scratchy notes. It was a strange surrounding for their last interview of any duration. She looked at him sadly. "It is of your honour I think," she faltered.

"I know your advice is disinterested, Maria, but I cannot take it."

"I think, Sir, then, it is as well that I return to Brighton."

"Just as well, Madam," he assented.

"Before I go, your Highness, there is one suggestion I would offer. I hear things from my friend Lady de Clifford—from others. I cannot urge upon you too strongly the disadvantage that must accrue to your future happiness if you treat the Princess Charlotte with so little kindness, with the new severity that you are adopting that is so unlike you."

"Do people, then, say I whip her?"

"Ah, no. But with affection you now, Sir, may mould her at your pleasure, but soon it will not be so, and she may become, from mismanagement, a thorn in your side for life."

"That is your opinion, Madam," was his only reply.

He kissed her hand, and Captain Bloomfield escorted her from the room.

It was the only time he had ever consulted her on a political matter, and even then he did not take her advice.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE DAYS OF THE REGENCY

"It is one of those serious matters, where the spirit is more concerned than the flesh."

WE have all heard of the Carlton House *fête*, its fame has survived to our day, and I do not for one moment propose to give a description of it here, with all its foolish extravagances. The want of taste (or decency) in giving such an entertainment, which apparently was to commemorate the illness of the King, is obvious. The exiled Royal family of France was there, all the Royal dukes, of course. Lady Hertford, Lady Jersey, daughter-in-law of the Prince's first favourite of that name, who was just coming into his fickle favour, and all fashionable London. It was at first decided to ask no one under the rank of a peer's daughter, but as the Royal host found this decree was giving great offence, he rescinded it. Even then there was a great muddle—daughters were invited without their mothers; wives without their husbands. Although the service at the absolute entertainment itself is said to have been perfect, there was the very greatest confusion over the invitations.

The Queen, who highly disapproved, was not present, nor were the Princesses. The Duchess of York was there, but his daughter Charlotte was absent—though, perhaps, she was too young—and so, of course, was the Princess of Wales, nor did Maria put in an appearance, and the whispered joke went round among the guests that night watching their host and his middle-aged flame, that there were *two* wives sitting at home.

The reason why Maria was not present (though she received an invitation) is simple.

For many years, in fact, on all previous occasions of

festivity, on account of her unique relations with the Prince, all had sat at table without any reference to rank—it was his own delicate and considerate idea. At the time she received the card, she heard through her friends at Court that it was the Prince's intention that the severest, most rigid etiquette was to be observed in relation to precedence, thereupon she wrote a refusal.

That very evening she attended a reception at Devonshire House at which the Prince was present. After a while she found herself near him, and, disengaging himself from the man he was conversing with, almost immediately he came over to her and greeted her formally.

"I am glad you are here," he declared, "for I wish to speak to you. Why have you refused the invitation to my *fête*? It has hurt me extremely."

"Where am I to sit at table, then?" she inquired, looking squarely into his face.

He gave a deprecatory wave of his hand. "But you know, Madam, you have no place," he told her, very much in the tone one would adopt to a troublesome child.

"None, Sir," she replied, "save what you choose to give me."

"Believe me, you had better change your mind, Madam," he said, "if only to prevent gossip."

"It is a deliberate plan of your Highness's to humiliate me. I shall not go."

He bowed and smiled. "You must, of course, Madam, please yourself, 'tis a lady's privilege, and though I should like to see you present, believe me, you are free as air." He bowed again and kissed her hand, then he hastened away, for Lady Hertford, on the arm of a gentleman, his breast covered with orders, could be seen approaching.

Maria sank down on a sofa, and there presently the Duchess of Devonshire, who had been Lady Elizabeth Foster, and had only married the Duke something under two years before, found her. She came up and took her arm. "You must come and see the Duke in his own room," she said, "as he is suffering from a fit of gout; but he will be glad to see an old friend." Then, in a different tone, "Why, what is the matter? Your face looks as though you had seen a ghost."

"I have seen no phantom," she said; "rather have I been face to face with hard reality, Duchess."

"Sit here quietly and I will get you a glass of water without anyone noticing, without any fuss." She turned and glided away. Presently she came with it through a small door just beside Maria's sofa; a piece of ice clinked musically against the side. "Now you take this," she ordered, "and then walk through the rooms with me and face boldly everybody." That was the only direct allusion she made.

"I am giving you a lot of trouble," said Maria, faintly smiling.

"Nonsense," said the Duchess, stoutly, sitting down beside her. "Now don't hurry yourself, but when you are ready, we will go."

They walked through the rooms arm in arm and came directly upon the Prince and Lady Hertford *tête-à-tête*. The Duchess squeezed Maria's arm warningly, and they passed on. Outside the Duke's room, she said, "Stay here in the quiet just as long as ever you like, I will send your cloak up to you. Perhaps, you do not care to go into the rooms downstairs again to-night—they are hot, are they not? Pity me, for I must stay on duty." She introduced her into the invalid's chamber, and there, with a smiling nod, left her.

Forty-eight hours afterwards, early in the morning at Number 6 Tilney Street, there arrived the Duke of York.

"What is this I hear?" he asked indignantly. "You have refused to go to George's kick-up on the 5th?"

"*Friedrich*, dear, he does not want me now."

"*Potztausend!* Not want you, indeed! I think he must be mad. We shall be obliged to have the King as sub-Regent next. What has he done, what has he said, *der Schwein?*"

"Oh, my friend, my kind friend, my brother almost—"

"Molly, lass, I am quite your brother—never doubt it, dear, never."

"Oh," she said, and in another moment was crying in his arms.

Little by little he wormed the story out of her, though he said, as she finished it, "Yes, it is the same tale I heard before. I have been to Carlton House this very

morning to tell him what a fool he is, but he won't alter his arrangements, won't hear of it."

"It is as well," she said. "I am glad almost that he has taken this initiative, and I don't think I could live another five years like what the last have been. Yes, *Friedrich*, it has come to that."

"And you intend finally separating from him?"

"I do. I have thought so for some time, only he has implored me again and again to forgive him. 'The woman tempted me.' Alas! alas! what a hackneyed, sordid story it is."

"He swears that his connection with Lady Hertford is innocent."

"I know he does. But, oh, *Friedrich*, there are others!"

"Molly, will you drive to Kew with me to-day? The Queen wishes to see you."

"The Queen?"

"She has something to say. There is something that must be said, and it comes better from her."

"The Queen has always been kind to me," she said simply. "She has treated me fairly and with gracious forgetfulness of my position."

"Then you will go? But it must be to-day, she is there only for a day."

"I can be ready as soon as ever you wish, Brother—since you will let me call you so."

"My chaise is ready waiting at the door," he answered.

As he said, the Queen had come to Kew from Windsor but for the day only. She came to make arrangements for the removal of the King there. Maria had not seen her for several years, and she found her much aged. She was now in her sixty-eighth year, she was as withered and dried as an old apple, but it was easy to see she was just as sharp and shrewd as ever; she looked like an uncanny little witch.

She gave Maria's cheek her customary little peck of salutation, and started to speak of the King's illness and to abuse her eldest son for his ingratitude, his inconsiderate behaviour, and most of all for the *fête*. "'Ee ask me go, an' what for 'ee ask me go? Because of my dimon' to dress

ze room, zat is vy. 'Ee will be poonish, I fear not—ze chile, ze Princess, you 'ave see her?"

Maria said she had.

The Queen threw up her hands as though disclaiming her power to describe the delinquencies of her granddaughter. "She will take it out of 'im, she speak now in his manner to ze King of dirty year ago. She ups and answers 'im. I could laugh zoomtime tis zee King an 'isself ovaire again. An' now as to you. I tole you zat of goot of your marryin' of 'im zere could come none, and now I have right—is it not so? I tole you too—I keep my vord alway—zat your poseetion as ze vife *mörganatic* should be my care. My son 'ere, my Frederic, 'ee tell me zat you 'ave noddings."

"I have money of my own, Madam."

"Zat ees as though he were not at all. George 'ee marry you, an' 'ee shall keep you—I myself to it have seen. He is to pay you seex tausand poun' a year."

"Your Majesty, I do not ask for it."

"Nor do I ask you eef you ask. He is to pay it. Zat is so, my son?"

"It is only fair and just, Molly."

"What kind hearts there are in the world!"

"Zere are many, zat ees soh, but one in ze boosim of my son ze Preence Regent—it doose not beat. Ze money is to be pay to you, it is all fix' and settle, an' as 'ee vill back oot if 'ee can—do I not know 'im?—'ere is a mortgage on ze Palace vot swallow all ze money at Brighton, if he pay not, you can sell 'im oop."

"Oh, Madam."

"Vell, placed like you, I vould. Confound it, if I vould not," said the Queen. "'Oly Poker, he dinks ze vorld an' everyone een it—me, you, us all—made for 'im. I 'ope ze King will leeve to be von 'undred an' ten, and for jus' two pin I tell 'im so."

"Madam, his head is a little turned by his sudden access to dignity. He has always tried, I honestly believe, to be a good son to your Majesty, I know his devotion is great and sincere."

"Fin' excuse, fin' excuse, fin' excuse!" said the Queen, cynically. "It be vat I 'ave done zince he were dree years

old, zey are all use up now. An' zat yoong meenx," reverting to her favourite topic "an' her mothaire—*Gott!* she am like 'er mothaire, zink you not so? But you 'ave nevaire seen zat mothaire."

"The Princess, Madam, in feature is the replica of her —of his Royal Highness your son."

"But she 'ave 'er mothaire's 'sauce,' you call him 'ere, I dink. Ze ole woman, they say, she do not zee, but she do"—she nodded—"ebery bit. Ze Preence my son 'ee get rid of you, he zen geet 'is devorce and 'ee marry again—zee? An' as long as ze *Mädchen* stand by 'er mothaire an keep 'er straight, the more deeficult for 'er farthaire to get the devorce, and she see for 'er own sake 'ee mous' not, or else 'ee marry, 'ave a son, an' if 'ee do zat 'er chance of being queen, where am 'ee? Oh, ze ole woman, she know all," concluded her Majesty, with a great assumption of cleverness, snapping her withered jewelled fingers.

"Your Majesty, I want to know that you do not blame me for leaving him."

"Oh, no," said the Queen; "only remembaire when 'ee are ole and broken, if you are alive—I shall be not—an' 'ee vant you, you are still 'is wife."

"I shall never forget it, Madam, I never have."

"*Ja*, I dink zat you 'ave mean well, an'"—grudgingly—"eef you haf done no goot you 'ave done no 'arm. Go now, for I am busy, and before ze night fall 'ave to see many mans."

And so Maria left the presence of the cynical, embittered Queen, who so remorsely weighted up her nearest and those who ought to have been her dearest. It is not for us to blame her, for her life had been long enough to disprove every illusion, so all around her now was only tawdry and threadbare. Charlotte, the Queen, had her good qualities.

And Maria accepted the six thousand that this little spider, who sat so many years unconsciously weaving the net of Destiny, and tampering with the threads of Fate in stealthy secrecy on the throne of England (for the King was always a mere figurehead), threw her. Perhaps Maria took it because she thought it was her due, perhaps because she could not refuse; anyhow, she regularly drew the

money, nor did she destroy the mortgage which the Duke of York told her his brother made no trouble whatever over, and which, on the contrary, he seemed pleased to sign. She divided her time between London and Brighthelmstone, and devoted all her energies to watching over, tending and educating the child Minnie, whom she idolised. She was received everywhere, the Royal dukes were her constant visitors; at long intervals she saw with great secrecy the Queen, but the Prince Regent never. She avoided him most assiduously—it was the only thing possible. Once only they met face to face; it was at a ball given by a Lady Aylesbury, and he cut her—dead. This was just a fortnight before the great victory of Waterloo.

To go back to two years before this, she was sitting one day quietly sewing with Minnie, now a tall, slim girl—it was at her London house—when the door was banged violently open, and without any sort of apology, Mrs Jordan strode in, in a terrible rage.

"I have come to say good-bye," she announced.

"Where are you going to?" asked Maria, astonished. As can be well understood, these two women had never really sympathised, and it was now some time since they had even met.

"I am going to France," she said violently; "I poison England."

"Why, Dora, how agitated you are! Minnie, dear, take your work to the drawing-room, my child."

Scarce had the door closed, when the actress broke out: "For the last month I have been at Weymouth with my daughter, Mrs Allsop, and what do you think? The moment my back was turned, *he* went down to Margate and *proposed marriage* to three girls in one week! The third, if you please, accepted him, and the Duke of Cumberland wrote and told me. I wrote him a letter and I said, 'Just you wait till I get hold of you, and I'll fair settle you before I've done,' I said; 'I'll teach you,' I said. What's to become of me, I should like to know, with nine children thrown on my hands? 'You brought 'em into the world,' I said, 'and you can keep 'em. Perhaps you'd like me to go and sing in the streets, or dance at a fair, at my age. If you were only a man, you'd feel ashamed of yourself. No wonder folks call

you Silly Billy, never did a name suit anyone better.' I tell you I let him have it."

"And what did he do, or say, in answer?" asked Maria, trying not to be amused, and presuming that "he" meant the Duke of Clarence.

"He? Pooh! he had not the gumption to do anything, he always was a poor stick. He got, like a whipped dog, behind that painted, powdered, laced-in popinjay of an elder brother."

"And the result—"

"The result? Oh, I've got to go, that's all. He'll pay me two thousand a year as long as I'm out of England, and the same for my girls. He will look after the boys, he says. I'm glad of that, George is so mad to be a soldier—so is my second boy Frederic. But it is not his doing, it is that beastly brother of his that is to blame. He told me that I was not respectable last night, that his brother was thinking of settling suitably to his rank."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'If you can get anyone to marry him with my nine children tacked on him, you are cleverer than you look.' They'll be starting holding Methody meetings at Carlton House next. All I can say is, it is a damned shame at my age, but the weakest always go to the wall."

And this was the end of the connection that the *Era* a year or two ago politely called "a morganatic marriage." Under the title of "Mrs James" the heroine died in the Waterloo year, and was buried in the cemetery of St Cloud. With two thousand a year of her own, it cannot be said she was exactly abandoned to starve (the Duke had but ten thousand, all told, himself), though that is the popular and incorrect version.

The Duke was married in 1818, to Princess Adelaide of Saxe Meiningen, and on his becoming King, his eldest son, Colonel George Fitz-Clarence, was raised to the peerage under his father's Irish title and the eight others were granted the precedence of the younger children of a marquis.

CHAPTER XXXVII

KING GEORGE IV

"I am so utterly alone!"

THE years have flown on. Winters and summers have come and gone again. Waterloo is an event long passed by, and the great Napoleon has sunk crushed beneath his sorrows. Princess Charlotte ("the fair-haired daughter of the Isles"), Sheridan, Dora Jordan, Charlotte the Queen, King George III., the Duchess of York, the unjustly-accused Caroline, the unfortunate Duchess of Devonshire —wedded after all those years, but to become a widow (the Duke died in August 1811)—all were dust, only Maria seemed left to live on.

The brilliant, dissolute epoch of the Regency was over, and little Minnie was a wife and mother.

Looking from her broad verandah, when she was at Brighton, from the Steyne to the moving sea, the view of which was rapidly being obscured, and then back to the gay crowd passing and repassing below, Maria would muse and dream, and those that were there would seem to melt away and their places be taken by ghosts; the opposite houses would fade, and the broad stretch of land seem bare looking, perhaps, but young again, and she young with it, and then it would all come back as it really was, and the place, though so familiar, had landmarks that accorded ill with her thoughts, that wandered far back into years long dead.

So, too, in the faces of her visitors; she knew their features so well, yet there ever seemed something wanting, for they were not the friends she had loved, but their children and grandchildren. A twist, a turn of the head,

some chance mannerism, would send memory flying back, for there was Sheridan's vivaciousness, or Queen Charlotte's alert, peremptory manner, something of Lady Elizabeth, or a look of poor reckless Dora Jordan, at last at rest in English soil, whither her devoted son had carried her—poor, pretty, unfortunate Jordan.

"I shall show in the world occasionally with an unbended crest, because people must understand there is no wrong, no sin between you and me, or ever was." Those are the words she said to the Prince when they first parted—those were the sentiments she tried to live up to all through the latter part of her long, lonely life. At times there were stately balls and gatherings at her London and Brighton houses.

But there could be nothing of that sort this cold, long winter of 1827, no festivities whatever; there was mourning all over the country and deep grief at Steyne House, for the day I am writing of is early in March, and but six weeks before the Duke of York had been buried. A stone's throw away—over the pagoda towers and minarets floated the Royal Standard, and beneath it, desperately ill, lay the King.

Yes, King at last; he had been King seven years, and dust and ashes must it have been to him, poor man. He was too old to enjoy the freedom, the grandeur and stately dignity of it; besides, he had all that while he was Regent. Wifeless and childless, almost friendless, relations had long been strained between himself and his second brother, now his heir, the Duke of Wellington disapproved of him, which surely galled his conceit, and Lady Conyngham, he must have known, only fawned on him for gain. The sums of money that rapacious woman, who had the audacity to wear the Crown Jewels, extorted from him will never be known; he must have known that she only studied her self-interest, and submitted only because he feared a worse loneliness should she and her sons and daughters and daughter-in-law and grandchildren be dismissed. The least one can say of this is, that it was an artificial domesticity, and must have been particularly unsatisfying even as that.

She was at Brighton now. "Lady Steward of the

Household" was the capacity she filled. She lived in a house in Marlborough Row, now Marlborough Place, I believe it was Number 7, she also had her suite of apartments in the Pavilion, where there is a private staircase in the wall between the room which was hers and that of the King.

She had not a horse, a carriage, a cook, nor even a maid in her own employ; her husband's very valet was paid by the King. When she gave a dinner, it was cooked at Buckingham House in London, or in the Royal kitchens at the Pavilion at Brighton, and brought to her house in hot water dishes, and, if necessary, warmed up. There is a story I have heard my father tell of the King ordering a certain pair of horses. "He could not have them—oh, dear no. Lady Conyngham had sent a message to the stables that *she* might want them."

The tales about her amongst the older Brightonians are endless and always unsavoury.

Mrs Fitzherbert was now seventy-two years of age. Seventy-two is an advanced age; it is a venerable age, when the bearer is venerable too, as she was.

She was upright still, her step was firm and stately, her eyes were clear and steady, her ruddy cheeks showed health. Her hair, which in her youth had been so luxuriant and of so beautiful a colour that it seemed a pity to hide it under the white of powder, was now snow-white by nature. Both she and the Prince had worn powder long after many had discarded it, and now it seemed, with this plentiful white hair, as though she had but taken to it again. For her age, she looked a comparatively young woman. The long, quiet, regular years that had elapsed, fifteen years unruffled and calm, save for passing grief for those who, one after another, had slipped silently away, ever contracting, however, the circle of her friends. It is providential that the old and middle-aged do not feel as the young and hot-blooded do, or the closing years of their lives would be indeed one long, bitter agony. In point of fact, the passing years had restored serenity to her brow, and smoothed into pleasant kindliness the lines of pain that Time and Lady Hertford had so jealously marked on her

face; she actually looked younger now than she did at fifty-six. A sort of Indian summer of after-bloom, that ofttimes one sees in some people, was now hers.

Minnie was married well, and happily married to her cousin, Lionel Dawson, who was a colonel in the army. She was already the mother of two children. The whole family was now staying with Mrs Fitzherbert; they had come for Christmas, save Colonel Dawson, who a fortnight afterwards had followed them on his long leave.

"Will you drive with me this afternoon, Minnie?"

"Oh, Mama, such a cold wind," objected Mrs Dawson, with a shuddering look towards the window.

"It is not really cold, and I never heed the weather, but go out without fail regularly."

"Then you should not," objected Minnie, decidedly. "Already you have a chill. Now, don't you dare to deny it, Ma'am, for I detected latent signs as far back as last night."

Mrs Fitzherbert smiled. "I have no cold, dear child, 'tis your fond imagination; if you were with me always, you would spoil me with your cossetings. Come with me, dear, I feel stifled in the house, and I see so little of you now, I would fain not be separated from you a whole afternoon of your all too brief visit."

"Of course I will go," said Mrs Dawson, jumping up.

The day was grey and sharp, and there was that peculiar, indescribable feeling in the air that betokens snow. Mrs Dawson remarked on this as they drove along the comparatively new King's Road, opened by his Majesty on the anniversary of his succession to the throne, five years before.

"Yes," acquiesced Mrs Fitzherbert, looking towards a weathercock on a house they were passing, and which pointed due north.

"I wish we had not brought the children," said Minnie, anxiously.

"We will not go very far, dear; we will turn and drive towards Rotting Dean." She gave the order, and Mrs Dawson leant back with an air of relief.

Returning, they met the "Lady Steward of the House-

hold" taking the air, accompanied by her daughter, Lady Elizabeth; she was in one of the King's coaches, drawn by four horses with outriders.

"I hate that woman," said Mrs Dawson as they passed, "yes, I do. She arouses all my most unchristian feelings, with her fine clothes, and her imitation grand air, her presumption, her insolence—the *parvenue!*"

"Minnie!"

"They say, 'set a beggar upon horseback and—'"

"Dearest child, it is no concern of ours; say no more."

"Well, I hope she will ride there," declared Minnie, mutinously.

They drove now some distance to the east, and again turned, this time bound for home.

"Oh, by-the-bye, I have two books with me to change at the library," said the younger lady as they neared their destination.

"Send someone with them, Minnie."

But Minnie was fastidious. "As the snow is so kindly keeping off, I think I will change them myself," she said. "I like to choose my own books, a messenger will bring wrong ones, something one has read before, or does not want to read at all. I would rather go myself, if you do not mind."

And the other assenting, they drove to Wright's Royal Library under the colonnade, where still one may see in the manuscript list of subscribers at irregular intervals the entry —"Mrs Fitzherbert, £1."

"I declare," exclaimed Minnie, "if this is not past all bearing!"

Apparently, someone else was fastidious about their literature, for the imposing equipage of Lady Conyngham was drawn up before the door.

"That odious woman!" said Minnie, vigorously. "Can't one turn in the town without sight of her?"

"Let us go back, dear; this is all my own fault—I ought never to have stayed in the town when I heard the King was coming."

"It isn't the King," said Minnie, bluntly, "it's the abomin-

able people he surrounds himself with, more's the pity. And turn back for her? Not I."

They were now arrived at the library door, where several other carriages were standing. Lady Conyngham turned a slow, haughty head and Mrs Dawson eyed her defiantly, till her eyes dropped, then she descended and walked into the place. Presently she returned, flushed and victorious.

"They had only one *Fair Maid of Perth* in," she whispered. "I took it almost out of the hands of *her* footman."

"Oh, you did not, surely?"

"Oh, but I did. Ugly, horrid thing! she's jealous of you."

"Minnie, you must not say that."

"But I shall, it is the truth. I saw her look at you, you dear, sweet darling, you look so pretty in that bonnet."

"You think so, child."

"But you do, perfectly angelic. If only we could meet —*somebody!* Oh, it is my one wish."

Maria nodded ever so slightly as though in warning to the correct backs of the liveried servants in front of them. "Speak in German," she said, adopting that tongue herself.

"Oh, I do," persisted Minnie. "Darling, I have wished it all these years, and now that you are in the same town together every day, I have said to myself, perhaps, by some chance, we might meet him without that dragon. But now we shall not, for though his gout is worse than ever, he—they—are to leave here to-morrow, or the day after—at least, I overheard that just now."

Mrs Fitzherbert strove to repress a sudden start.

"What is it?" abruptly asked her adopted daughter, twisting round until they were almost face to face.

"I—I don't understand."

"There is some secret you are keeping from me," she continued, speaking rapidly; "there has been all along. Ever since you heard the King was coming, you have been nervous and strange, I may almost say frightened in your manner. Contrary to your usual habit of always flying from him, you have stayed on here, and now you hear he is leaving, you are uncontrollably agitated. What is it? Tell me, darling."

Mrs Fitzherbert stared in front of her in silence for a few

minutes, then she said suddenly, "You are quite right, Minnie, I stayed here with a reason. I wish to see the King."

"Drive up to the door and demand to see him," counselled Mrs Dawson, instantly.

"I have no right."

"More right than that detestable Lady Conyngham, anyway."

"And be confronted by her? No, thank you."

"Choose a time you know her to be out."

"I have," she said.

"You have?"—astounded.

"Yes"—bitterly—"last week. I saw her son, Lord Francis. He professed to go direct to the King, and presently he brought a message both cruel and vindictive, a message I will never believe his Majesty sent, although he declared to me that those were the very words he used."

"Of course he did not send it," answered the other, elevating her nose. "Why don't you write?"

"I have. But what is the good when that young man is his private secretary?"

"Jailer. But if Sir Benjamin was now here, how different it would be."

"Yes," said Maria, sighing.

For Sir Benjamin Bloomfield, for many years so high in the confidence of the Regent, had been a great friend of hers. Now he was supplanted by Lord Francis Conyngham, the Lady Steward's second son.

"Oh," cried Minnie, "to think of your going there without telling me; it was not quite kind, dear."

"Why should you be troubled?"

"Why should I not? It is my duty and my privilege. Ah"—in a different tone—"see who is coming here. We shall at least have our news authentic now." She turned a brilliant smile on a gentleman on horseback, who, raising his hat, would have passed them. "Sir William," she cried sweetly, as he checked his horse, "can you tell me the latest news of the King?"

"His Majesty is well," said Sir William Knighton, reservedly.

"I heard just now that his gout was worse," exclaimed the lady, in innocent surprise.

"Some people talk unduly," said the doctor, angrily.

"And when does he return to town?"

"I am not at liberty to state."

"Then, Mama, he will see me, I think—"

"No, no," interrupted Sir William, hastily, "he is mourning for the Duke of York."

"Surely, if he is well, he will not refuse to see me, his adopted daughter."

"He is not well enough for that. I mean—"

"You do not intend to allow it, in fact."

"No, Madam, the quietness and health of my august patient are before everything, and he must not be excited." With a slight pause, he concluded maliciously, "He needs all his strength to resist the importunities that constantly assail him on the so-called Catholic Relief question. I trust and believe, though, he will remain as firm as his father did before him, though a bitter tussle awaits him on his return to London."

"No good there," said Mrs Dawson as they drove on again. "Why, dear, what is the matter? You are trembling. You have this matter much at heart, I know, but you can do nothing."

"Nothing."

"Is that what you are so anxious about seeing him for?"

Maria nodded. "Yes," she said.

"It would be useless, worse than useless," declared Mrs Dawson, warmly.

"I do not know. There is just the possibility; it would not be much to grant me, and if I could only see him and ask him, I think he would—oh, Minnie, I think he would do it for me. He has never forgotten me, child, has he? Oh, is it not wonderful, when you think of it? I was so much to him once, I do not think he could quite forget. I scarcely needed the confirmation of that letter, dear." For on Minnie's marriage the King had sent her £2000 to buy herself a wedding present, with a letter that concluded—"Always remember to take care of my dearest old friend, Mrs Fitzherbert." "What a grand thing if I could obtain it, Min."

"But you can't, dear. You see that you can't," said Mrs Dawson, stepping out first, for they were now arrived. "You are feverish," she continued anxiously, when they were in the house again. "You ought to lie down until dinner—would you like it taken up to you?"

"Perhaps. If the door is shut, however, don't let them disturb me. You are right, a rest will do me good."

But Mrs Dawson was not so easily dismissed. She accompanied her guardian to her room, and stayed talking to her. "You had better undress entirely," she suggested, throwing aside her own outdoor wraps. "It is so much more restful. Shall I take down your hair?"

"No, thank you."

"You will be so much more comfortable. Who's there?" For there was a knock at the door. She went across to it. "There is a man by the name of Batchelor asking for you, mamma," she said, after an instant's parley, shutting it. "I have told them to send him away, Of course, you cannot see him now"—decidedly.

"Oh, yes, I will"—quickly. "Run, Minnie—stop him."

"Not to-night, dear"—soothingly. "He will come again. Who is he?"

"I must see him," she reiterated. "Do go and stop them from sending him away."

Protesting still, Mrs Dawson went after the servant.

"What fortunate chance has sent him?" muttered Mrs Fitzherbert to herself. "Perhaps here is an elucidation to my difficulty."

Presently Mrs Dawson returned. "The man is in the morning-room," she said.

"I will go down at once, then," returned Maria.

This man, Batchelor, had been the body-servant of the Duke of York, and, since his death, had been taken into the service of the King. The August before the day I am writing of, the Duke of York had been at Brighton for some time, and that visit had been the last occasion on which Maria had seen him alive. At that time, Batchelor was nursing him night and day. When the Duke died, and she heard that he had been taken into the King's employ and had accompanied him to Brighton, she had at

once written him a few lines and expressed a desire to see him, so as to learn further details of his late master's last illness, and he had answered that as soon as he could he would do himself the honour to wait on her. That had been a month before. Presumably this was his first chance of fulfilling the promise, and never was anyone's advent more opportune.

Concealing her impatience, she greeted the man, and, telling him to sit down, proceeded to ask him several intelligent questions on the ostensible reason for his call, and then, almost insensibly, they drifted on to the subject of the King.

Batchelor said his symptoms were very similar to those of the Duke, a combination of dropsy and gout in this case, contrary to that of the Duke's, which was principally gout. "His eyesight is very bad, too, Madam, and he is at the greatest pains to keep his sufferings secret. He will come laughing and jesting from the company, and the moment that he is in his apartments, it will all drop like a cloak, and he will be completely prostrate, with hardly the energy to stir a limb. It is his pride, and his Royal Highness was just the same."

"Do you think his Majesty is in danger, then?"

"No, Madam, not immediate danger, but he has drunk hard and lived hard in his time, pardoning your presence."

"When does he leave here?"

"To-morrow, I believe, Madam."

"Why has he so suddenly altered his arrangements?—do you know?"

The man hesitated.

"Tell me," she insisted quietly.

"Well, Madam, the Marchioness wants to go to town, though Sir William do say as he ain't fit to be moved. That's why I have come here to-night, it may be my last chance."

"I want to see the King," she said then, looking straight at the man, "and I want you to help me."

"Impossible," he cried, starting. "It would be as much as my place is worth."

"If you are dismissed, I will take you into my own

employ; anyhow, for your assistance I will pay you handsomely."

"Madam, do not seek to corrupt a poor man."

"Where is the harm in it? The King is surrounded in those he trusts by self-interested people. I—I have as much right as they—more right, for I— Oh—" breaking off. "You are not their servant."

"No, thank God," said he, emphatically. "A worse mistress I should never wish to serve, Madam. What do you want me to do? No one is ever admitted to his Majesty without her leave."

She leant across and spoke a few words, at the purport of which he stared. "Can you take me into the stables?" she asked. "I have the keys."

"Indeed, Madam, I can do that for you," he said.

"And if you will, I will give you a £100—gladly."

The mad freak that had impelled the Prince of Wales to construct a subterranean passage was to be useful to her after all, and his words had come true, for did not a dragon now bar her path?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AFTER MANY YEARS

"Am I not lone, as you are, without ties?
Childless and husbandless, yet bitter true."

"WHO is he? what does he want?" Mrs Dawson asked herself, as she waited about outside, determined if the interview was too protracted to bodily terminate it and carry her mother off. "I will not have her over-excited, she is poorly already," she thought.

She did not listen, but she heard two sentences, for the people on the other side of the closed door unconsciously twice raised their voices.

"Impossible. It would be as much as my place is worth," was the first; the second, "I will give you a £100—gladly."

"Oh, he is a servant of the King's, is he?" said Mrs Dawson to herself; "and he is going to arrange an interview. Well, I will be on the alert. She shall not go alone."

Then the man came out and went away.

"No, I will only sit in front of the fire and rest, dear," Maria said, as Minnie accompanied her again back to her room. "I won't lie down, it has got so late."

The other looked at her sharply, but she threw herself into a chair with a genuine tired sigh, and Minnie's inquiring expression relaxed. After a little feminine fussing round the room she came on tiptoe and bent over Maria; satisfied her eyes were closed, she walked softly across the room and out of it, closing the door ever so gently after her.

Scarce had the latch clicked when Maria started up.

First bolting the door, she next produced a bunch of keys. In the corner was an ordinary safe. Opening it, she took out a small cash-box; unlocking this and lifting out the tray, she slipped her fingers unerringly to the right corner and produced a bunch of four keys. Putting the box away, she re-fastened the safe, and then, drawing on a long-hooded cloak she took from her wardrobe, she went to the door, and unbolting and opening it, listened.

Then came an afterthought. She returned to the dressing-table and, possessing herself of a box of congreves, stole back to listen again. The landing was already illuminated, so was the hall, and she heard footsteps crossing the parquet below. Silence succeeded, and then very faintly came the sound of chords being played and a man's voice singing. Good, she thought. Colonel Dawson was practising a song to his wife's accompaniment.

Locking her door from the outside and pocketing the key, she came with noiseless footsteps to the top of the double staircase. Listening again, she descended on the side farthest from the room whence the sounds of music came. There was no one in the hall, and an instant later she stood in the cold night air outside.

At the top of Steyne Lane, Batchelor met her, and together they proceeded silently from East Street to North Street, now brilliantly lighted with shops, then dismal and obscure, for all the booking-offices for the coaches, which were principally there, closed at dusk. Down the New Road they went, skirting on the right the Pavilion grounds, and to the right again, until the big dome of the stables loomed before them. Pausing, she fumbled for the four precious keys, selected one, and then muffled herself in her cloak.

"Take my arm," said Batchelor. It was the first time he had spoken, and she obeyed.

In front of the stables sentries were pacing, and they slackened their steps until they were walking behind one who had turned. Her escort now was talking on indifferent subjects with all the appearance of being quite at ease.

Suddenly, he pushed open a small door. A horsey-looking man stood up inside a kind of box.

"My old mother is very anxious to see inside," explained Batchelor, who appeared to know him well.

After some parley, the man reluctantly let them pass. The courtyard was shadowy, and no one prevented their entering the building proper, where there were several open doors.

She had been down this passage but once since its completion, it was the last time its owner was at Brighton before the old King was seized with his final illness. It was then just finished, and the Prince had proudly shown her the skilfully-concealed entrance; two doors stood side by side perfectly alike, one only led to a cornbin. Then, too, he had given her the fourth key, that opened the final door of what was now her Mecca.

"Don't you know your way, Madam?" asked Batchelor, horrified, for even he, though aware of the passage, did not know the precise entrance—the King was jealous of the secret.

She had not been inside this place for fifteen years, and at first she glanced about, much bewildered by certain structural alterations.

With dexterity he twisted her into an empty loose box; there was bustle and confusion all around them, they could not hope to stay undiscovered long; fortunately, most of the horses seemed lodged on the further side.

"Where is the entrance to the Riding School?" she asked.

"Right across there, Madam."

"I know now," she whispered back. She slipped from the box and went along a few paces. A lad with a pail came clanking directly towards her in the dimly-lighted place, for it was dim save where lanterns flitted about like fire-flies. She stood quite still, close against the wall. He passed, whistling, and she crawled on again. At last! She stood before the twin pieces of panelling that looked so exactly alike. Now was the crucial test—would the key act after all those years, had the locks been changed? She inserted it, and, with a loud, grinding burr, it turned; so

loud it sounded to her that she wondered that everyone in the stables did not come running to see what was going on; then she swung the heavy door open and the black chasm yawned before her. She looked back with a chill of horror to see that Batchelor had button-holed a man who had been coming her way, and who, if he had not been hindered, must have seen the open space. Then, summoning her courage, she passed the door and shut it to after her. Inch by inch, in the perfect darkness, she felt her way down the stone steps. The air struck her, damp as that of a tomb, and at a forgotten bend in the wall she nearly lost her balance, but she reached the bottom at last. There she ventured to strike one of the congreeve matches, which were then retailed at one shilling a box. The first missed fire, the second spluttered and then gave a faint sickly, flame. To her joy, she saw stuck in an iron sconce in the wall a half-burnt *flambeau* she hastened to take this down and light it.

The passage appeared unchanged; it was about seven feet high and about three feet across, but the roof being rounded to the walls made it seem smaller.

On, on, down the narrow way she went, with frightened mice a-scampering and a horrible damp smell.

She reached the end at last and, extinguishing her torch, unlocked the door before her. Past this, she was in the open air again in a sort of narrow gutter or yard, where the dull, threatening sky above was the only roof. Then came another door and she was in the Pavilion itself.

Before her there was a spiral staircase similar to the one she had come down at the other end. Now she felt as though she could go no farther, her limbs suddenly seemed bereft of the power of motion, as the whole wildness of the expedition came to her with intensified force. At the top of that staircase was the King's room, but what madness to have come after his repeated refusals to see her for, perhaps, after all, it was true that he refused to receive her. He might have people with him. What would he say?—and what would they say?

But after coming so far, she could not turn back, and she roused herself wearily, and slowly ascended the steps. At

the top was an ordinary door of which she also had the key. Within the room all was semi-darkness, lit only by a pair of candelabra. There were clothes everywhere, on a long table was a coat and a brush, just as they had been left, the task of brushing half finished. She crossed this apartment, the next was slippery beneath her feet, for it was marble-tiled; it was the bathroom of the King.

The thing that struck her most was the intense heat, it was as though she were approaching a furnace. Now she was in his Majesty's bedroom itself, and a large cheval glass that directly faced her caused her almost to scream, as she crept like a guilty thing through the door, and she saw her own reflection. So far, she had met no one, it might have been a palace of the dead, but now she heard a voice speaking in the room beyond, though there was no one in the room where she was. It was a small room, directly facing the windows, in an alcove without drapery, was the bed, to the right and left of this appeared to be cupboards; and beside her, facing the cheval glass, roared in a large fire place an enormous fire, giving the only light in the room. The voice beyond continued, apparently reciting something in sing-song doggerel Latin. Old as she was, her heart beat loudly, for she knew the voice.

The intervening door was ajar and, hastening across, she peeped through.

In front of a second flaring fire, wrapped in a dressing-gown, was the King, quite alone. His right leg and foot were bandaged and swathed to an enormous size, and were supported on a separate stand. He had no wig on, only a dirty silk night-cap, and his pettish, disagreeable face was that of an old, old man. Even as she watched, he seized a hand bell that was near him and rang it so violently that the little hammer inside broke and fell from it to the floor. At the first ting a door at the other end opened instantly.

"Has that infernal Knighton returned yet?" asked the King of the man who appeared.

"No, yo—"

"Is that damned fellow Batchelor still gadding? Send him to me at once, when he returns—these damned bandages are so damned tight—*Go!*"

"Shall I loosen them—"

His Majesty raised himself on his arm and sent the bell, still in his hand, hurling at the man's head, and following it also a bottle of *sal-volatile* that he snatched from the table. The servant retired.

"Damn them all, damn everybody!" muttered the King, sinking back again gloomily. He plucked fretfully at the richly-embroidered cushions on which he reclined, as though trying to arrange them more comfortably, and then abandoned the task with a weary sigh, moving his head restlessly to and fro, as though seeking in vain an easy posture.

Maria's heart overflowed towards him. For months she had been hoping to plead with him for his favour towards the pro-Catholics, but never—no, never—did she think to find him like this.

Some movement of hers must have attracted his attention, for he looked sharply in her direction. "Who is there?" he demanded, with a peremptory frown. She hesitated, and then she saw that his face was frozen with horror, and she knew that through some of the numerous mirrors he had seen her. To relieve the tension of his fear, she came forward.

"Are *you* dead too, *Mariechen?*" he gasped. "No, don't come near me, don't come near! Great God! have mercy! Don't come!" His voice rose to a shriek, but no one in the room beyond, even if they heard, took the slightest heed—no one dared go near him until they were summoned, and they were accustomed to hearing strange noises, for, sitting all alone, he would mimic eerily to himself people he had known, many of whom were then dead.

She hastened to reassure him and apologise. "I am not dead," she said, "indeed, I am not dead; forgive me for having frightened you, I ought never to have come so, but your Majesty was deaf to all my entreaties, and I would implore a boon of you for—the old sake's sake."

"Not dead," he repeated, still staring. "Then how did you come here?"

"By the secret passage. Once, long ago, you told me that the freedom of it was always mine."

"Come nearer," he commanded. "Is it really you?"

"Yes, it is really I."

"I am almost blind," he said, and passed his hand over his eyes. "Yet I see that there is some deception; powder is not worn now"—he shrank away. "You are not my Molly."

Inexpressibly touched, she held out her cool, firm hand, "Your Majesty, I can only repeat my apology; really, I am no ghost."

Hesitating still, he took her hand and kissed it, broken and crippled as he was, with something of the old courtly air.

"And it is really you, and you would ask a favour of me? Madam, I swear 'tis granted before I hear it. On my honour, of your previous petitions, believe me, I have heard nothing. Damn it!" This last exclamation was at a twinge from the gouty foot.

Guessing as much, she looked at the bandaged member compassionately.

"The tortures I have suffered with it are infernal," he explained. "The only man who can dress it to my comfort is away—confound him!—poor York's servant."

"Let me loosen the bandages," she suggested suddenly, and knelt down beside him.

"You cannot!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"I used to," she said, with a laugh that was sadder than any tears could have been. "Do you remember the first time you had gout? We did not know what it was, and you would let no one touch your foot but me."

"Do you remember?" The world is never empty entirely for us when there is some human being to whom, with ourselves, that sentence can bring identical memories; wonderful is its power. By it, Maria, instead of pleading the cause she had come to urge, quite unconsciously, but three minutes after she had reached his presence, knelt, coaxing with tender fingers, gentle and light in touch as a fairy's, the bandage that held on the oiled silk of the outer wrapping.

"The pressure is over the ankle," he explained. "O-oh!"

After a while, "Is that easier?" she asked.

"Much easier," he answered. "Thank you, *Mariechen.*" He was hammering at his cushions again.

Without waste of words, she rose to her feet, and passing into the room beyond, selected two pillows. Returning with these, she raised him with one arm, and, removing some of the cushions he had there, and re-arranging others, she placed the pillows she had brought so that the cool linen came in contact with his face.

"You have made me more comfortable in ten minutes than those fools do in a day," he said. "Do you remember my first attack of gout, and how you would not come to Carlton House to nurse me, until poor York fetched you and told you how really ill I was?"

"I do, Sir."

"Poor York," he repeated, with a sigh. "You knew my late brother, did you not?"

"I loved him dearly, as you know"—staring.

"Ah, yes, I remember"—politely.

"Long years ago, fifty years ago, I lost my best and dearest brother Frederick, and then I met yours, and ever since, so good, so kind, so dear and true was he to me, that never once I felt the loss, but now it all comes back, and, old as I am, the pain is double."

"Poor York," he repeated again.

"It is at his recommendation I intrude upon your Majesty now. I told him—that honest, tender friend—the very last time that I saw him alive, my anxieties upon a certain subject, and he advised me to be bold and apply direct to you."

"I am grateful to him," he said ceremoniously, then—"How is little *Minchen?*"

"Minnie is happy, her husband loves her. I thank God that she, my dear daughter, has not soared foolishly, as I did, and is content to stay where He put her."

The King opened his eyes and looked at her. "It was not that with you," he objected quickly.

"No," she said. "No, Sir. Oh, I am glad you believe still that it was not that."

"It was not so, I know that it was not so. You are the only person I can say it of—save Charles. It would be good to be young again for some things, Molly."

"Sir, your mention of poor Mr Fox encourages me; the cause I have to plead was so near his heart. You told me once you promised him to be lenient. Oh, for his sake—for my sake—"

"'*Et tu Brutus?*' Cannot even Molly come without a request?"

"I did not know that you wanted me. You yourself dismissed me, and have never called me back."

"I think I have wanted you always, and have pretended to myself that I did not," he said, with a smile. "I remember after Waterloo, when I came back to England, I nearly came to you as a surprise that very night."

"Came back to England!" she echoed, astonished.

"Tut, tut!"—his smile became a frown. "Are you one of those who deny that I was there? 'Twas my generalship gained our great victory. I tell you I was there."

"Yes, Sir, I have been misinformed—'twas a slip of the tongue." She was confused.

His eyes were suspicious. "I was there," he maintained. "And why do you say Sir?"

"Because you are my King, and, alas, only my King."

"And what is the favour that my brother of York promised you that I would grant, and why must you talk about it directly, when you have not seen me for so many years? Once, for a few minutes at least, you would have forsworn business."

"Once matters were so different between us, Sir."

"Ay. Well, what is it?"

"The Emancipation Bill, your Majesty. Oh, give us freedom—give it to me, if you will not for anyone else. It is your disapproval that is the reason why we languish unrelieved. Sir, we have not met for fifteen long years, in all human probability we shall never meet again. Once you swore you would deny me nothing, even just now you promised to grant my request before you heard it. I never asked a great thing of you before. Oh, give me this now."

"My brother sent you to plead this," he asked, astonished. "My *brother!* A better Protestant never lived."

"He told me he was sorry for us, but his conscience told him that your Church was the right one, and, believing that,

he could but say the remedy was in our own hand by obeying its mandates. Nevertheless, he confessed that he thought you might lessen our load, and when I implored him to ask you, he said, as an honest Protestant he could not, and advised me to see you myself. And I have come, Sir, to beg, to pray it of you."

"That accursed religion," he said, his brow darkening. "You always considered it before everything, even me."

"It is all I have to consider now," she reminded him.

"True. Say then—only say, mind you. I gave my favour to Canning's grand scheme; I, too, have a price."

"Do not put it so."

"I am breaking up," he said quietly; "I sha'n't last long."

"And I am an old woman," she answered, "older than you are."

"Yet, you willing, we will make one more start. I will turn over my last new leaf, *Mariechen*, for now I see you again it all comes back."

"I have always remembered, Sir, though that is natural, and, oh, what you suggest cannot be."

"Why not?"

"Does it seem possible?"

"Very possible. Though, I warn you, your life will be little more than that of a sick nurse."

"On that count, Sir, I could ask no more. Oh, is this your price?"

"It is my price."

"To call it that! To nurse you, my dear husband, now that you want me again. Can God grant so much?"

"You would like to come?" with a little animation.

She laid her hand on his forehead.

"Yes," she said quietly, smoothing it back, "I should like to come."

"To me you look just the same," he said.

"To me you are always just the same, Sir," she returned.

"That confounded Sir, how it grates from you, Molly. Do not be so formal, *meine Frau*."

"Oh," she exclaimed pitifully. "Oh, my poor, reckless wilful love, that you should have come to this! Great in the world, great in power and riches, envied by thousands, you yet are like this." The tears gushed to her eyes. "Molly is with you now, love," she whispered, "and, God willing, my dear, my dear, she will never leave you, neglected and alone, again."

As I stated elsewhere, immediately over the apartments of the King were those of the Lady Steward. Now, while Maria was with the King below, in the room above a woman was prosaically preparing for the advent of her mistress to dress for dinner, for those times phenomenally late hours were kept, the King never dining until eight or eight-thirty.

When things were all prepared to her liking, she, who had long been aware of a female voice below, determined to investigate and see if it was her mistress's.

Standing on a chair, she reached down a key from a ledge on the woodwork, where Lady Conyngham, no doubt, thought it securely hidden, and, opening the door, she tiptoed down the private stairs until her ear was at the keyhole of the other door.

She had not listened very long before she discovered that the voice was strange. Her curiosity redoubled, and, hearing footsteps approaching, she removed her ear and applied her eye.

The person moved around several times before she was absolutely certain who it was; apparently it was someone looking for something which she at last found on the mantelpiece. Standing by it, her face was lit up by the fire, and unmistakable.

The woman watching sank back on the stairs, astounded. What could it mean? Radical changes were coming in his Majesty's domestic arrangements, she doubted not, and how would they affect her? was her first thought. She listened again. But the conversation was too low for her to distinguish it, and by a few stray words she learnt it was in German, a language of which she knew nothing.

Presently, the female voice raised itself slightly, and she discovered that its owner was saying what apparently were

some final words from the threshold between the two rooms. The King made some answer, then his visitor said, "So be it, as you insist, dear one. In twenty-four hours. Once more, good-bye till then."

She walked across the room and disappeared into the King's bathroom, and, save for the hissing of the wood fire, there was silence. The strange visitor might have been a ghost, so mysteriously had she vanished. For of course the watching woman knew nothing of the passage.

Slowly the spy returned to the room above. She was not Lady Conyngham's servant, and if that individual was summarily dismissed, she did not in the least intend to share her exile. Yet, if she were banished, she, the maid, whilst still remaining a Royal servant, might be in a very different position from what she now was, for the duties she had to fulfil were light and easy, save for her mistress's temper. She thought in her small, mean soul that nothing would be a greater pleasure than to see the Lady Steward deposed and humiliated, only she decided she could not afford the luxury. No, she must warn her. But, on the other hand, if she did warn her, would she not fly to the King in high dudgeon — "My maid tells me," etc., and thus give her a character for indiscreetness that would effectually number her days? "I will sleep on it," she determined finally. "After all, I have twenty-four hours."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE MACHINATIONS OF A LADY

"Alone for evermore."

"DEAR!" exclaimed Minnie, "dear, wherever have you been to?"

Maria stood in the doorway with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, a few snow-flakes flecked her dark cloak and glistened, half melting, like diamonds, in her hair.

"Where have you been to?" repeated the other, drawing her through the hall and into a little side room, for the servants were staring. "I thought you were asleep in your room."

"Minnie, my child, you will rejoice with me, I know, but to-day you said you wished it. I have been with the King."

"Mama!"

"Oh, my darling, my darling, think of it, I have seen him again after all these years."

"Did he consent to be less prejudiced against the Catholics, as you were going to ask him to be?"

"Yes, but at a price, Minnie—such a price."

"A price," repeated the younger, astonished.

"He would have me return to him," she said, with a beautiful, stately pride. "Can you believe that, after all these years, he would have me return to him?"

"How did you find him?" asked Minnie, wonderingly, "in health, I mean."

"Oh, my dear one, too sadly. He is ill and neglected and old, as old as I am. It seemed so strange to see him thus, with his memory gone and his mind filled with delusions. He who used to be so brilliant, who had almost

the strength of ten. He would think nothing of carrying me up or downstairs, and you in my arms too, when you were a child. Did I ever tell you how he wrenched a great gate up from the ground for me?"

She had done so several times, only Minnie did not say so.

"But now he is weak and ailing—why, he wants me again. And he is so considerate. He was more thoughtful for me than I have ever known him before, he swore that for me to return to him would entail on my part great sacrifices—as if it would, or, even if it did, that I should count it. He told me to consider it. And to please him I have promised to do so, promised to take twenty-four hours to decide if I will go when he, my dear husband, wants me. But invalids have their little fancies," said the old lady, with a new delightful bustling air of importance, "and it is best to humour them. So I am to go to him to-morrow night with my decision, the same way that I went to-night. Minnie, did you think such happiness could ever come to me?"

"Dearest Mama, I am, indeed, pleased; I only hope you will receive no disappointment."

"If I do not go, if he does not see me, he says he will understand I cannot make up my mind to brave the world again for his sake, and take it as a final intimation. Oh, how I long, my dearest, I cannot tell you, to give him this first proof of my unwavering devotion. Nearly fifty years, my Minnie, longer than all your dear life."

Never did a period of time seem so long in dragging out its weary length as that twenty-four hours did to Mrs Dawson.

Although apparently so strong and really well and hearty, Mrs Fitzherbert was not of an age to bear intense prolonged excitement without feeling grave results from it, and Minnie feared that she would be ill.

"Rest, dear," she urged, "try and sleep; you will be all the better, all the stronger for to-night."

But she would talk, although Minnie implored her not to. She detailed a thousand petty trifles, silly, trivial things in themselves, remarks he had made, his fancies,

likes and dislikes, and all the little nothings that go to make up a personality that a loving woman will notice and comment on, and, in her heart, treasure up, never to forget.

She got out her jewel-case. Things he had given her, to every one of which there was a story attached. "I was a beauty in my time, child, they used to tell me—I can say it without vanity in my old age. Princess Golden-hair he called me once. I wish that it was not white now. He is to go to town, dear, as soon as he is better, and send for Bloomfield, Lord Francis will then be dismissed, and—but we are to arrange it all to-night."

And so the day dragged on and at last evening came.

Maria had arranged with the King that she was to visit him in the same way again. "Chained here as I am," he had said, "with that confounded Knighton playing into C.'s hands and she into his, as I know they do, it is best. Once I get back to town and am over this bout, things shall be different. You shall see."

At about the same hour she set out. This second time she was accompanied by Colonel Dawson. By what judicious tips he got her into the building again does not matter; Royal servants are as venial as others. Suffice it to state that she reached again the desired goal and again made use of the invaluable keys. She was serenely calm and confident this time, she had none of the fears of the night before. She walked steadily and quickly, yet without heightened pulse, through the long, musty tunnel. Discovery had now no terrors for her—if it came to that, would not the King protect her? At the end, she inserted the key in the lock. So far all had gone well, but now, twist and turn it as she tried, it would not move; the lock would not act! She put all her strength into it, she cut the palms of her hands with the force she used on the sharply hammered iron of the key handle. Alas! alas! it was not to be. Try as she would, every effort was in vain.

To explain what had happened it is necessary to go back a little way.

That morning found Lady Conyngham's maid in just as

undecided a state as she was the night before, and in the end it was chance that cast the die.

"You are pulling my hair, you careless creature," said the lady at her toilet.

"I'm not," answered the servant, sharply, for she felt she had the whip hand.

"You insolent woman! how dare you contradict me?"

"Don't rile me, then."

Lady Conyngham, not unnaturally, was highly angered at the insolence of the speech.

"Don't you dare to answer me again, or you shall be instantly dismissed," she flamed.

"Dismissed, is it?" asked the servant, banging the hair brush on to the toilet table and putting her arms akimbo. "Perhaps it's yourself that'll be dismissed first."

They faced each other defiantly, as Lady Conyngham sprang to her feet. "Are you bewitched, woman?" she asked. "Leave this room instantly! Leave it, I say. Another word and I will have you thrown bodily into the street."

Then the servant forgot her own interests. She threw discretion to the winds in her anxiety for the triumph of the instant, forgetful that she was ultimately playing into her enemy's hands.

"Where you will be thrown to keep me company, you ——" She laughed shrilly, and she called the Lady Steward a name that was more realistic than polite.

"How dare you! How dare you! Who is to throw me there?"

"*Mrs Fitzherbert!* Papist, or no Papist, she's a damn sight better than you, by G—"

Lady Conyngham wavered, her horrified eyes scanned the woman's face. She sunk back in her chair, in that one instant conquered. "What do you know?" she asked feebly, as her quick brain whispered, "Make terms."

"What will you pay me?" The woman was visibly triumphant.

"How do I know it is not a lie?"

"Wait and prove it, then. She was with the King last night."

"The secret passage!" exclaimed Lady Conyngham.

"Is there one?" asked her servant, comprehending.

"Never mind that now. Tell me everything you heard."

"I'm not to be dismissed?"

"Indeed, no, of course not. Why," with a forced smile, "I could not do without you."

"And I want £20."

"Yes, whatever you ask. Quick, girl, tell me."

"No, I want the money first."

With feverish haste and trembling hands, Lady Conyngham searched in her desk till she found four notes.

And at last the woman told her. She did not ask for more money, for was there not here an inexhaustible treasury? Oh, it was apples and nuts to her to have the great Elizabeth, Marchioness of Conyngham, whining and fawning on her like a little dog.

Later in the day, Lady Conyngham went to the King's apartments. His Majesty, who had suddenly rallied and declared himself quite well again, had been out driving. These sudden recoveries are a well-known feature in constitutional gout. Of course, she knew of this passage, and guessed that her rival had arrived that way the night before. Inwardly, she determined by some means or other to discover the individual who had been daring enough to admit her to the stables themselves; her revenge would then be summary. That, however, was a matter for later consideration, her business now was to prevent the intruder's ingress at any cost. Procuring the other keys, which were then in her son's possession, she proceeded to investigate. It was as she thought. The dust of years lay thick (oh, the many things he had constructed for him, at vast expense, only to prove worse than useless), and down the centre of the way it had been brushed by footsteps and a woman's skirts. At the bottom of the steps, too, lay an overwhelming proof, a handkerchief worked with an elaborate monogram—M. F. From the first, she had been so sure, that she had her plans all cut and dried. Leaving the door, the stable end, severely alone, she successively

one after another plugged the remaining three locks with some parched peas, skilfully inserted with that womanly weapon, a hairpin. Having made certain that all three locks were prevented from acting, she retired well pleased. All was quite safe now, unless the King on his return investigated, and this, she reasoned, was very unlikely. He did not. That afternoon he was ill again. Having put his foot to the ground long before he ought to have done so was one reason, and celebrating his recovery with Madeira and port wine, before it was an accomplished fact, was another. By three o'clock he was stretched on his back—moaning, groaning and swearing—worse than ever.

As the afternoon wore on, the lady's numerous spies brought her word that the King had dismissed everyone from his room, bad as he was. At this she betook herself—dressed alluringly, with every charm she possessed, heightened by rouge and jewels as she was—to the staircase where her servant had made the great discovery of the night before, and there hour after hour she waited.

At last, as the big clock without chimed eight, she rose and returned—stiff, cramped, but triumphant—to her room. One of her daughters was waiting for her, only they, so at least she had thought, knew the secret of the innocent-looking door. "The King dines in his own apartments to-night," said the damsel. "But have you just come from—"

Lady Conyngham shook her head.

"I thought you could not have, for he sent for you but a few minutes ago."

The Lady Steward touched her face with her powder-puff, preparatory to obeying the Royal command. The smile of victory illumined her face. For the moment, at least, she had won. She felt more reconciled to the heavy price.

Meanwhile, Mrs Fitzherbert twisted and wrestled in vain with the refractory lock. The plugging was so skilfully done that it withstood all her force. It was as well she did not know, poor woman, that there were two more impassable doors, besides this one, barring her way. She

wondered if she had the wrong key, and tried them all, one after another. Gathering all her strength, she folded her arms on finding this would not do, and hurled herself at the door, one, twice, thrice. The stout wood stood firm, and did not even crack. Feverishly, she tried all the keys again, but the force she had already used had split the peas in sections, and it would have needed a skilled smith to get the lock into working order again. She forced the tips of her slender fingers in the rather large hole, she broke the pin of her brooch in it, and when, at last, she really despaired, her grief was terrible. Almost within call of her, the King fretted and fumed angrily, and cursed himself for his folly in letting her go, and his generosity in pointing out some of the disadvantages that might accrue to her by returning to him. "If I'd thought they would have weighed with her, I should never have suggested it, it is so unlike her. *Potztausend!* She has changed mightily."

And on the other side of that cruel door she crouched miserably. She knew that it was useless to stay, yet she could not bear to leave it. From time to time she would make one more and yet one more effort, throwing herself furiously against it, and heeding not, nor even feeling, the bruises on her body. "He will think that, having considered all he pointed out to me that I should have to endure, that I have decided to forsake him. And how can I ever let him know otherwise, surrounded as he is, and will he believe me?" Forgetful of everything, she hammered so loudly on the door, that a faint—very faint—echo of it reached Lady Conyngham's strained ears, and at it she laughed very softly, being well pleased. And then nearer to her came the restless sigh of the King.

Maria came away at last; heartbroken, she crept away. Twice, by some irresistible power, she was drawn back for one more effort, and then at length she came finally away. She did not mind if anyone saw her now, as she came up the steps at the other end. In fact, she rather hoped that they would, and possibly there was an improbable chance that it might reach the ear of the King that she had been seen. But the stables were deserted, dark, and very quiet,

save for an occasional stamp or the running of a clinking chain.

She found a door unbarred, and no one deterred her from passing outside.

It was snowing heavily. It had snowed the night before, and it was crisp and fine when she had come out a few hours before, but now the air was full of swift, silent flakes. The gruff voice of a muffled sentry startled her, and at his order she moved away. Slowly, in face of the blinding storm, she made the circuit of the eastern side of the building. She went as close as she dared to the northern entrance, and was again ordered off. The eastern front looked dreary, for there were the unlighted state-rooms. She shambled on, with scalding, bitter tears for *his* disappointment forcing their way one by one to her eyes. The tears of the young are summer thunder showers that relieve a temporary over-pressure, but the tears of the old are awful: they are like white blood.

Three times had Colonel Dawson tramped the distance that intervened between Steyne House and the entrance to the Royal stables, for the cold was too intense to stand still even for a man comforted with a cigar. He marched up and down for what seemed to him an endless period of time, then he went home again to see if she had returned. She had not. And, despite the snow, Mrs Dawson, who had began to grow anxious, issued forth with him.

"What do I care for the snow, Leo, with Mama out in it? It cannot hurt me."

By the time they were in Church Street, she was in a very excited state. "Oh! what can have come to her? We ought never to have let her go," she kept on repeating. It was now nearly nine o'clock. Presently they met a good fairy disguised as a watchman, who owned to having met a "suspicious-lookin' famale" who answered to their description.

"How dare you?" said Minnie, indignantly. "The lady was—" but her husband pressed her arm to silence her injudicious tongue, and they hurried on.

They found her but a stone's throw from her own door.

She had fallen insensible in the snow. The Colonel, who carried a lantern, was flashing it freely about, but Minnie's loving eyes first saw the familiar clothes and the little fallen heap, half hidden in the snow.

With a cry of horror, she knelt beside her and gathered her in her arms. "Leo," she cried, "he has tortured her all his life and now he has killed her."

Colonel Dawson said something unsuited to one who bore his Majesty's commission. "Stand on one side, little woman. Here, hold the lantern, I will carry her home. Do not meet trouble, my dear."

Two days later the King left Brighton, as it proved afterwards to be for ever. A large crowd assembled to bid him adieu, for, previous to this retired visit, he had not been in the town for three years, an unpredecented period of absence for him. All the inhabitants assembled on the Steyne and cheered madly.

Leaving the Pavilion by the northern entrance, his Majesty drove in his travelling carriage right down the eastern side of the Steyne along by the new Chain Pier for some distance, and then turned towards Hove. He was attended by Lord Francis Conyngham, and Sir Wathen Waller, a favourite page, who sat facing him.

From the verandah of Steyne House, which commanded a full view, Colonel Dawson saw the carriages pass on the further side and then again return along the sea front.

Leaving it for an instant, he went to warn his wife. "If you want to see him, come when I call," he told her.

She looked up with assent. "Leave the door open in between," she suggested. She was in the room they had borne Maria to that fatal night, and where, ever since, she had tossed in delirium. Presently, Dawson, hearing renewed cheering, called her.

She joined him at once. "It is pitiful to hear her, Leo," she said. "It breaks my heart."

As if in confirmation of this came the voice from beyond,—

"You cannot marry this woman, George. Promise me you will not, and say that you only tease me. Beloved, you

are mine, my soul, my flesh, my blood. In God's name deny it, if ever you had a spark of love for me, deny it!"

The shouts intensified.

"Come," said the Colonel, and led his wife into the sunshine out of the open window. The carriage of the King was now in sight. It drew nearer. The shouts of the concourse of people was deafening, for at Brighton he was truly beloved.

The chariot was passing the house, and, unknowingly, Minnie leant forward, and he raised his eyes. Whether he recognised her or not she never knew, yet that stately bow was undoubtedly for the occupant of the balcony alone.

The carriage passed on, the crowd cheered again and again till he was hidden from sight, then Minnie slowly returned to her charge.

"Love, love, do you remember we drove to Richmond, 'twas the 21st of December. And snow fell, so that all the earth put on white for our bridal. Dear, my King, you loved me then!"

CHAPTER XL

LADY CONYNGHAM TAKES EVERY TRICK

"It is that old wound pains me."

THE King was dying.

There was no longer any shadow of a doubt that his long, mis-spent life was rapidly nearing its close.

At stately Windsor the King lay dying, and had been in danger some time, only his loving subjects were but just aware of the fact.

That peculiar deception that seems an unwritten yet recognised etiquette in such cases, had, as usual, prevailed. He was to come to town in April to hold a Drawing-room at St James's, they believed; naturally, he did not come. Poor, lonely *Papillon*, whose gay fluttering was now to cease. He was hustled and bustled by Madame de Sieven, who had the objectionable Duke of Cumberland her foolish devotee, and who intrigued for his interests (by which her own would be materially advanced) against the Duke (there was only one Duke in those days—his Grace of Wellington). Him she hated, and he in return manœuvred the childish sovereign to the best of his ability for the country, an uphill task against the strong, combined power of Lady Conyngham and Sir William Knighton, with the end of his father ever hanging over him and haunting him like a nightmare, the King was not to be envied, tossed hither and thither like a leaf by the March wind.

After the passing of the Catholic Relief Bill in '29, the Duke's actions in this were so severely criticised that he fought a duel over it with the most violent of his detractors, Lord Winchelsea (who had been the second, years and years before, as a young man, of the opponent of the

Duke of York). When the King heard of it, he was very interested, and one who had long been a boon companion of his remarked, "He will be thinking he has fought a duel himself next." At the last the King was continually possessed of some delusion or another. As a typical instance, he declared and persisted that he was the jockey who rode Fleur de Lys, and won on him the Goodwood, before he died, and nothing would shake or disabuse him of this idea.

We learn that though "he retained his good looks to the last," yet he had a morbid, foolish horror of people seeing that natural difference the years had made in him, and when he drove in the grounds at Windsor, it was with an outrider ahead, to clear off anyone who might be about. He was still cheerful, and talked of the coming Ascot and of winning the cup, which he had set his heart on, for his great love of good horse-flesh survived to the end.

Poor, poor *Papillon*, his summer was over, he could flutter no more. His closing days must touch his greatest enemy, so small, so trifling, so petty were the things that engaged his mind. During his last spring he invented the envelope, a new dress for the Guards, and interested himself in the fish-pond at Windsor, spending hours at the little Chinese pagoda-like fishing temple at Virginia Water that bears so unmistakably the stamp of the peculiar form of architecture he affected.

On the 15th of April 1830, the first bulletin was issued, and in the middle of May the Duke of Wellington took the ominous step of sending for the Bishop of Chichester, Dr Robert Carr, formerly vicar of Brighthelmstone, to reside in the Castle in case of the supposition then formed rapidly becoming a certainty.

The King took to lying in bed all day, not rising until dinner; he ate well, but his sleep was wretched; he would have no one in the room with him, but rang continually to be told the time, to be handed his handkerchief; he would not raise a finger for himself. Mr Fitzgerald thinks that this complete inaction very much hastened his end. Lady Anne Hamilton, on the other hand, says that it is "a wonder that he lasted so long." His physicians were, of course,

numerous, but Sir Henry Halford, next to Knighton, was the one of most importance.

He lingered on, now better, now worse. His surroundings were the Conyngham contingent principally, and he amused himself with his young pages. (Mr Grenville was much diverted by Lord Conyngham, who was an old man, telling him at Windsor "my wife is ill—at least, so they tell me," "as though she was somebody else's wife," he pithily remarks.) The man Batchelor was in high favour, and the King would not bear him out of his sight. With the love of the gruesome, characteristic of his class, he would appease the King's morbid, depressed mind with long descriptions of the symptoms and last illness of his Majesty's "late ever-to-be-regretted brother," as the poor, old, lonely man termed him, and he would take a melancholic, unhealthy pleasure in comparing that case with his own, and drawing conparisons.

But it was not through Batchelor that he heard his last of Maria, she mistrusted him as having betrayed her. As has been already stated, when the King left Brighton she was very ill, and it was some time before she recovered, for she did recover. The disquieting experiences of those two days were quite sufficient to have shaken a far more vigorous constitution, but, owing to Minnie's devoted nursing, she recovered at last. She took no active steps to communicate with the King, and this was partially at the earnest advice of both Minnie and her husband, and she knew it was wisest.

"If he wants you he can send for you," declared Mrs Dawson.

"My fear is he will think me untrue," was all she ventured to protest.

"Pooh! he knows you too well for that; besides, there was straw in front of the house that day he drove past, he must have seen that, yet nearly two months have passed, and he makes no sign."

Her heart grew further embittered towards the King, for his resistance towards the Catholic Relief Bill passed all bounds, it was frenzied, and on the subject he would hear no reason; his rage with Lords Conyngham and Mount

Charles—his eldest son—when they voted in its favour knew no bounds. When it did pass, she knew it was none of his doing. Afterwards, he raised every possible opposition he could—for instance, declining to prick the Catholic sheriffs that had been nominated, and other like childish things.

And so the possible reconciliation, that was once within an ace of becoming a fact, by a stroke of Fate missed, and a similar opportunity never occurred again.

Yet Maria made a last effort, for when the bulletins began to be serious, she felt she could not let him die without a word. She wrote to him, therefore, and repeated the assurance that he had but to summon her, as he must know full well, that nothing would prevent her from presenting herself at his bedside; she said she had no objection to anyone he might already have about him, and finally, she implored of him not to consider her in any way, and if her presence could give him the slightest pleasure, or comfort, or afford him the smallest gratification, to summon her, and no power on earth should debar her from responding.

She knew this letter reached him, she was told that it had given him much comfort; yet the answer was but chilling silence.

He was in bed when it was brought to him, and, on learning its source, he "seized it with eagerness, and placed it immediately under his piilow." After a time, being for a moment alone, he drew it forth, and, breaking the seal, attempted with feeble, dim eyes to decipher it, a difficult task, though the sun was shining on him, and being aware what his sight was, she had written in large, round, black characters. Knowing from experience the people by whom he was surrounded, she also sent him a piece of plain white paper. After reading the letter through, on this he scrawled in the German of his youth and early manhood, that for years he had discarded: "My wife, come. I want you—" He had written but this in his wavering, shaky hand, that scrawled across the page irregularly, when he heard a tinkling, a rustling, a jingling, and to his nostrils came the odour of perfume. The Lady Steward spent two

hours every afternoon in his room, amusing him when he was not well enough to get up—she was arriving now.

The Royal culprit, like a discovered criminal, thrust the papers under the pillow again, as she came smiling in. Half an hour before, she had personally supervised the departure of three waggons of Windsor valuables she had taken for her own—but that is detail.

"Is that you, my Lady Conyngham?"

"Sir, 'tis I," she answered, and set herself the task of entertaining him, whilst he privately wondered how he could get rid of her, so as to finish the letter, and then whom he could best trust—or bribe—to deliver it. He thought, perhaps, did he feign sleep, she might go, and accordingly uttered a prodigious yawn, which was cut short by his cough, now becoming extremely troublesome.

But the lady, who was resting in a luxurious armchair beside him, had not the least intention of moving until the time was up. She honestly thought she was doing her duty by staying and making some return for the substantial quantity of property she was daily engaged in filching. And from shamming sleep to rid himself of her, the King passed to dozing in reality.

He opened his eyes, with a sudden little start. The room was just the same, with the afternoon sun streaming in, and the lady lounging near, with a novel on her knee. Without, there was a bee buzzing, and the note of a blackbird, cool and soft as running water. A quick fear assailed him, and he slipped his fingers under the pillow—the letter was *gone*. With an angry scream, he seized her. "You have taken it!" he charged her, the rest was lost in a torrent of incoherent rage. Lady Conyngham requested with dignity to know of what he accused her. It took her a long time to discover what it was, and longer still to convince him that she had not stirred.

"What was the letter?—who was it from?"

With unnecessary force and fluency, he told her.

With a cry, she threw up her hands. "Oh, Sir, the old mistake," she cried reproachfully.

He called his delusions "mistakes," poor man!

"Mistakes be hanged! Taylor brought it me himself an hour ago."

"Sir Herbert Taylor has not been near the Castle for three months," the lady asserted mendaciously.

For the first time he visibly wavered. "Is that true?" he asked blankly. "He must have been here"—he felt for the letter again, tossing the pillows about in his excitement—"he must have been here. I tell you I had it."

Lady Conyngham shook her head sadly. "I wish with all my heart I had got it, Sir, since it would afford your Majesty gratification."

"You lying Jezebel!" cried the King, rudely, "I will not believe your word. Call someone to prove it—Watty, anyone."

She rose protestingly. "I thought you were so anxious to keep your delusions a secret," she said disagreeably. "It is you that will be exposed, not I, by calling in all the world."

His face assumed a look of cunning that made it like his father's. "Another mistake, eh? But you will not tell anyone—promise me you will not?" entreated the poor invalid.

"Indeed I will not," she assured him earnestly, and rose shortly afterwards to first warn all his attendants, and everyone who had access to him, not to mention Sir Herbert Taylor's visit on any account to the King, for, owing to some extraordinary reason, it excited him uncontrollably, she explained. Then she retired to her chamber, to burn at her leisure poor Maria's appeal, and the King's last piteous answer that he had begun, never to finish, and that would never reach its destination. When he started up, shaking with the cough, she had heard a rustle of papers, and while he dozed had annexed the documents promptly, being of a curious turn of mind, for future investigation. How thankful she was that she had done so, when he told her what it was, may be best imagined.

"The silly, doddering old fool, to write it in German,' she thought; for, be it known, he had never either written or spoken German to her. "If he does not die soon, he will go as mad as his father was. Here is a proof." But then, you see, she did not understand.

And the King below sighed wearily, and wondered, in a

dazed, benumbed fashion, how much of his life had been real and how much only his imagination, till his brain reeled, and he longed for his release, sooner than surrender to the black phantom of possible madness that stalked grimly beside him and so embittered all his days.

Then he turned on his side, and, after slipping his hand under again, with the faint hope of producing the longed-for crackle of paper, exhausted at last, he slept, and as though in compensation to his sleep came the comfort of dreams, and he smiled, for in them he was young again.

To Windsor Castle two days later came the Iron Duke with some official documents that had to be signed, and certain proposed matters that needed the Royal assent before the preliminary steps were taken.

"Arthur," said the King, business being finished, "Arthur, I have already spoken to Knighton, and now I tell you, when I die, will you promise me to let me be buried just as I am?"

The Duke tried to turn these words lightly off, but the King would not be denied.

"Let me be buried in the shirt I die in," he repeated. "My dear friend, I am very desirous of this—will you see to it for me?"

"If your Majesty wishes it—" began the Duke.

"It is my last wish, Arthur."

"I will see that it is fulfilled, Sir; I promise it," said the Prime Minister, sincerely.

The King died on the 26th of June 1830. All day on Friday, the 25th, his physicians feared hourly his dissolution, yet life clung to him tenaciously, flickering and darkening, until at nine o'clock the attendants intimated that they could give him no further relief. At this the King bowed his head and murmured the same words that the Duke of York had used when the fatal news was broken to him three and a half years before: "God's will be done," he said. He requested that the Bishop of Chichester might be sent for, and at his hands received the Sacrament, and from then the weary, troublesome, racking cough, that had for some time past shaken and torn him to pieces, ceased. Finding

a difficulty in breathing, he signified by a gesture that he wished to be raised. Those in attendance obeyed the mute signal, and placed him in his chair.

At half-past eleven, there being no change and considering himself no worse than he had been for several days, he dismissed Sir Henry Halford (who, years before, as Dr Vaughan, had attended Fox), as he had been with him since seven that morning; then for some time he slept, sitting at a table with his head on his hand. He had grown used to this posture, for he could not breathe lying down. The other hand lay in that of Sir Thomas Wathen Waller, his favourite page. It is pleasing to note that now he had done with earthly things, the Conyngham contingent did not appear to have marred and polluted his last moments.

When he awoke, Sir Wathen noticed a great change in his face, and summoned the others from the room adjoining. His eyes became fixed and his lips quivered, so that they thought he was about to faint, but, rallying himself, he asked for some *sal-volatile* and directed that Sir Henry Halford should be summoned. He made several efforts to drink the *sal-volatile*, but could not. He turned his eyes, then, full into those of the little page, and gave the hand, which he still held, a grip that was strong considering everything. "My boy," he said, in the dread, solemn voice of one that had at last grasped the secret of the ages, "this is *death*." He leant back and his eyelids drooped, and the lad, for his tears, did not catch that last grave look in the eyes of the King. Now he leant over and gently as a woman might have done, drew the head once so proud, so haughtily erect, on to his shoulder. Only once more did the King make any sign. Sir Henry Halford hastily dressed and, still dazed from the stupor of dog-tiredness from which with difficulty he had been aroused, entered the chamber. The King's dim blue eyes opened wonderingly, a faint smile touched the corners of his delicate mouth, and with difficulty he extended a languid hand. Sir Henry took it, and the tired eyes closed again.

An errant breeze ruffled the trees without the open window, a cock crowed, and in the far distance came the bark of a dog. The clock gave one sharp chime, marking a

quarter after three. Sir Henry raised himself from his stooping position.

"Gentlemen," he said—there was a quiver in his voice and one slight break—"the King is dead."

"God rest his soul!" responded Dr Carr, mechanically.

The Duke of Wellington, who arrived too late to see his master alive, was yet in time to prevent his body being stripped, and, as executor, his orders had to be obeyed. "He is to be buried as he is," commanded the Duke, curtly. "When the Duke of Cl—when the King arrives," correcting himself, "he will issue his commands." As he was the only person there of authority, he hastened to put a check on the ravages of Conyngham & Co. who were openly and shamelessly packing up every valuable on which they could lay hands.

Entering the chamber of the King to fetch something, almost unknowingly he walked to the bedside. There lay the King, placid, serene, waxen, his handsome face almost as comely-looking as in the days of his youth. His wishes had been obeyed, and he lay, composed and decent, in the linen gown he had died in.

His Grace thought contemptuously of the flurried packers above. "A word of regret, an expression of pity would cost her nothing, and the seemliness of it is obvious," he mused. "I wonder why he wanted to be buried as he was?" An irresistible inquisitiveness seized him and he essayed to struggle with it in vain. "I wonder why it was? such an extraordinary request." He was alone in the room, and, half ashamed of his womanish curiosity, he yet put down his candle and bent over the body of the dead King. Hastily he unfastened the first two buttons of his night-shirt and, trembling with excitement, he saw that something was tied around his neck. A little jerk revealed it. It was a portrait of the lady who is the heroine of this story; it was the jewelled miniature that Maria had given to George when he was Prince of Wales on the night that Fox in the House had denied their marriage.

The Duke replaced it gingerly and, picking up his candle, tiptoed from the room, like one ashamed.

CHAPTER XLI

THE KINDNESS OF KING WILLIAM

"Old friend. . . . We two are passed into the grey of life."

COLONEL DAWSON DAMER, on the night of June 26, found himself on Westminster Bridge. He had been down to Buckingham House to see if there was fresh news posted up outside, and, finding none, was taking a smoke before returning to the house of his wife's mother, for ill-used man was denied the comfort of his "baccy" under a roof in those days and forced to wander abroad.

Matters are considerably changed with him since we saw him last. For one thing, he has left the army, and for another, changed his name, or, rather, added his mother's maiden name to his own on inheriting some property from her family; this was but a few months before.

The night was beautiful and calm, and he strolled on, in no hurry to return, for he found the silent house unbearable. The latest news that had filtered through was that the King was slightly better, that had been at six o'clock. After a while, he found himself on the bridge, watching the water silently, loath to leave it. A constable came over the bridge, and the Colonel, for company's sake, addressed him. The man easily fell into his humour, and stayed speaking with this affable gentleman. He was an old fellow, and his talk of fifty years' experience in the streets of the great city was entertaining. "I'm a-watchin' for the Boatman, Sir," he said, after a little while, "and I've watched a goodly few nights past. But he'll come, never fear, the Boatman's allays sure."

"The Boatman?"

"He came for the Princess Charlotte, Sir, he came for

Queen Charlotte too, and 'e come for the old King, and I think he'll come to-night."

"I do not understand."

"Have you never heard the legend, Sir? The young folks laugh, but it is true; there are other things than what we see, though I have seen it. Fifteen year ago was the first time that I did. It was for the Princess."

"Are you speaking of a ghost?" he asked, laughing.

"We don't know what he is, Sir. But when Queen Anne died, and the Germans came, he came with them. When the King dies or the Queen his wife dies, or the direc' heir, and it must be one o' they three, the Boatman goes down the river, and let others follow never so fast they won't catch him. He goes to Hanover, they say, to tell the folks there as their King is dead."

"How foolish, what rank nonsense!"

"If you'll watch long enough, Sir, you'll see him," persisted the old man, obstinately, "as I have done. *Ah!*" He gave a cry of terror. Colonel Damer turned cold all over, and felt his nerves grow rigid and his hair stir in the very essence of fear such as he never felt before in his whole life.

"Look, look! 'tis the *Boatman!*" screamed the old constable, and together, horribly fascinated, they watched. A little muffled figure, that, bending to rapid oar strokes, shot from under them. Not a splash, not an audible ripple, yet the water foamed and circled as the uncanny thing travelled swiftly, steadily on. So clear and distinct was the Rower, that the Colonel whispered, "Is it not a living man?"

"No, no," gasped his informant, who was shaking like an aspen leaf, "'tis the Boatman himself." Here he lost complete control of his nerves, and with a horrid cry started to run madly towards the Middlesex bank, and, brave soldier though he was, the Colonel hurried in his wake. To see the Boatman is an event that may well shake the most lion-hearted.

He recovered himself somewhat when out of sight of the river, and walked to Buckingham House. There was no news. He returned home with this information, and

his wife met him, pale, weary-eyed. "Minnie, this will be too much for you, you will be ill, little woman."

"Oh, can any of us sleep with this sickening anxiety, Leo? Heaven grant that definite information comes soon, and good, I hope, from my heart; he was always kind to me."

"Good, I fear, cannot come to stay, dear, for I think, poor man, his time is up; we all have to go. He may get temporarily better, but I doubt it."

"I have been with Mama," said Minnie, "until she sent me away a quarter of an hour ago. Dearest Mama, her fortitude is marvellous, though he has wounded her so sorely in sending no answer to her letter."

"Sit down and try and rest till she wants you," he suggested, telling her nothing of his experiences that night.

"I do feel tired," she agreed, and laid herself obediently on a couch, to start up almost directly from a half doze to know if someone was summoning her.

Twice, as the hours passed on, she left the room softly to return and confess that she had been denied admittance. And at last, when the summer sun had risen, and was pouring into the room where an untouched supper lay spread out, with the flowers all dying, there came a low, dull, muffled boom echoing through all the streets of London town, and people knew that the King's reign was finished.

Minnie heard it and sprang to her feet from her sofa, and her husband, awakened from an uneasy slumber in an armchair by the window, heard it too.

"Leo," she told him, "I am going up to her again. I think that—that now we *know*, she will let me in."

The death of the King made a very great difference to one person, for the poor, unnoticed Duke of Clarence, who had lived all these years in the world without anyone in particular troubling about him, blossomed into King William the Fourth, and became the cynosure of all eyes. How it must have embittered this simple, kindly, genial gentleman to have no direct heir to succeed him is but

dimly hinted at by history, biography and memoir, still we can well guess. What a contrast there is between his honest, rubicund face, his shiny, bald pate with its fringe of fluffy white hair, and his super-refined elder brother, the one all nature, the other all artificiality. King William always seems to have exuded good-nature from every pore, though he could be hasty too. Witness the story of the man who, kneeling to receive the honour of knighthood, rose up at the first tap, instead of waiting for the concluding two others, and his Majesty, letting him, as he was so hurried, go away plain "Mister" as he came. One must like King William.

"On the death of his brother, he sent the Duke of Sussex," says Mr Grenville, "to Mrs Fitzherbert to tell her to put her servants into mourning for his brother, yet he would have none himself, nor allow those around him to wear it." Mr Grenville goes on to say that it looked "very odd."

Almost immediately after his succession, he went to Brighton, but it was only a flying visit. Later, in the autumn, he returned again, however, having with him the Queen, and what the same acute historian expressively and rudely describes as "*touts les batardy*," and it was on that occasion he had an interview with my unfortunate lady, who had gone there on the death of the King. He had not been long in the town when he dispatched his eldest son to her, to ask why she had not been to see him?

"Tell his Majesty," she said, "my position is so peculiar, and, gratified as I am, I can hardly avail myself of his condescension until I have made a certain communication to him."

"Can you not do so when you come to the Palace, Madam," suggested Colonel Fitz-Clarence.

She seemed as though thinking, and then suddenly, after a minute or two, turned to him as though she were decided.

"Will you ask him to honour me with a personal communication here in my own house?" she asked. "You may think this a strange request, but to me it seems imperative, if I am to accept his gracious invitation, which would give me sincere pleasure, I need hardly tell you."

"I will give him your message," said he, "and I am convinced that my father will be agreeable to your desires, dear Madam, for I know he has the greatest esteem, respect, I may say affection, for you."

"I think he has," she said. "Our real friendship, though, dates from the day—an unlucky one for me—that I first saw you."

"It was a lucky one anyhow for me," contradicted the Colonel, gallantly, "and you grieve me, my dear lady, inexpressibly, when you say you have found it otherwise."

"You silly, foolish boy," she said, with a little laugh, "as though you remembered it. Why, you were only a baby of nine months old!"

And in answer to this appeal, on Monday, September the 11th, his Majesty, with a flourish, came dashing up to her door.

She had received no notification of his coming, and came somewhat flurriedly to meet him. She had never held the intimate relations with him that she had done with the Duke of York, and of late years had seen but very little of him, since poor Jordan's banishment, in fact. However, now he came rolling across the room to meet her, his jovial manner the same—unchanged.

"Why, what is this?" he cried, taking her hands warmly. "Is the old man so changed that you are afraid of him, or what?"

"How good of you to come," she faltered.

"Good? Good, not at all," he contradicted in his bluff, breezy way. "I should have been here before, my dear, if you had sent for me. And now I am here, why, I'll take a tankard of beer, if you will offer it me."

"Oh, of course, Sir, I—" She rang the bell confusedly.

"Don't put yourself out, Ma'am, pray don't put yourself out for me, but I've been trotting about a bit this morning. I've been to see poor Nelson's widow, among other things; she's stopping down here. Do you know her?"

Maria said she did, very slightly.

"Fine woman, egad, in her day. I gave her away when she married him, you know; we sailors have an eye for a pretty face." He walked to the open window, sniffing, and

there drew a deep inspiration. "You've a good view of the sea here, Ma'am, and Gad, the smell of salt water puts new life into me."

"How you love it!" she cried involuntarily.

"Love it? Ay." He rubbed his hands together. "My dear, I feel like a boy down here. I've been on that Chain Pier this morning early—it was fine. It puts me in mind of the best place in the world, and that's the deck of a ship." He stepped out on to the wide verandah. "You have got the best view here of anyone round the Steyne, my girl," he observed, looking from right slowly to left. "And, my timbers, what a fine view you have of poor George's monument."

"It is very like, I think," she said.

"Damme if it isn't looking this way!" exclaimed the King. "Sink me if it is not! He had no say in it, do you know?"

"I do not, your Majesty."

"His hand is stretching this way too. Well, it is a pretty compliment, my lass, whoever designed it." He stepped inside, and here the beer arrived. Apparently it pleased him, for he smacked his lips appreciatively as he put down his glass, emptied at a draught. "I wanted that," he observed emphatically. "Well, my boy tells me you have something to show me or give me; he was rather vague. What is it?"

She had been greatly dreading this question, and she nearly trembled as silently she produced a bundle of papers, and, selecting one, laid it before the King. He fitted a pair of spectacles on his nose and examined it.

"Zounds!" was his first ejaculation; then, "By the Lord Harry! I say, my girl, is this genuine? I heard whispers, of course. But I never believed them. Blowed if I did!"

It was the certificate, to this day extant, bearing the signatures—"George Augustus Frederick," and "Mary Anne Fitzherbert."

"I knew Fox had gone out of his way to deny it, or something, and afterwards I heard them talk, but it was no concern of mine. And you were married?"

"I was married—we were married."

"Great God!" ejaculated his Majesty. "Poor old George! He was a good 'un at heart, you know, but he took a wrong turning, somehow."

Those words of the simple King well express it, for George the Fourth was a man of many parts and brilliant understanding, and I do not think there was ever so excellent an example of evil communications corrupting good manners as that his life furnished. I believe, if he had only had a name to make and the world to fight, instead of having everything to hand as he found it, he might have grown old as a useful, honest, respected member of the community, and gone down to his grave loved and mourned.

"Then you are *ipso facto* my brother's widow," said the King.

"I am your dear brother's widow," she answered; "but will you read these other papers, Sir? and it will doubly assure you of my right to so describe myself."

He looked through them slowly one after another. There was the mortgage on the Brighton Pavilion, there was a will written by the late King in the first week of their marriage. There was the paper that had been drawn up at Devonshire House by herself and the Duchess, with Lords Southampton and Onslow, Mr Bouverie, Keit, the surgeon, and Roberts, the valet, the day after the betrothal, and there were love-letters and protestations innumerable. There was the Papal Brief that the Reverend Father Nassau had fetched from Rome. I cannot enumerate all the documents that she laid before the King that day. "Damme!" he would ejaculate from time to time, whenever he lighted on anything especially startling. After some time, he said, "What a find all this would be to some hack publisher! What do you propose doing with it all, my dear?"

"I am going to burn it," she said. "I only intend keeping what will be sufficient to vindicate my character and the innocence of my relations to your brother. Can your Majesty advise—"

"No, no," he interupted quickly, "this is no matter for me—I'm only a rough old man, my dear, I don't understand

all the manœuvres and lies, and thieving of lawyers any more than I do Statesmen. If I may make a suggestion, if you put yourself in communication with George's executors, or I'll speak to them for you if you like, and you mutually agree on a good solicitor, then they can go through these papers with you as they are now doing all his others, and submit to the lawyer those you decide to keep, to get him to say if they are legally right and sufficient to protect your memory. If you think that it would be too much for you to attend personally, nominate two persons (as there will be two on the other side) to represent you."

"I might do that," she agreed.

And so he allowed you six thousand a year? Humph. Well, that's my business now. I see you've put your servants into mourning as I told you to, but now you are my brother's widow, you can use my livery—do you hear?"

"Sir!"

"Why not? Though I can hardly realise it yet, even with this scrap of paper before me. He had denied it so flatly to me so often, and called it an absurd story, a malicious lie;" then, seeing that he was distressing her. "And that reminds me there is another command I am going to lay on you, you are the only person that regrets the poor fellow, I see you are in black, my dear, but I should like to see you dressed as a proper widow."

"Oh, may I?" she asked, astonished. "I thought of it at first, only it seemed foolish and ostentatious and—"

"And now I order you to. I am sure it was no lack of respect that has caused you to refrain, quite the contrary, my dear. What amends can I make you?" he then asked. "Would you like to be a Duchess? most women like a handle to their name, that's my experience. It would give me great pleasure too, and I should feel that I was atoning for what somebody else ought to have done ten years ago."

"Your Majesty, I wish no rank—ever since I married your brother I have retained the name of Fitzherbert, I have never disgraced it, and I do not wish to change it. You must accept my most unfeigned gratitude for your kind, gracious proposal, and I beg you to let me retain my present name."

"Well, well," he said good-naturedly, "but when are you going to visit me? George told me you promised to do so after I had first been here."

"Oh—but— How kind you are to me, Sir; I never go anywhere, not since— I am so retired."

"Nonsense, I must see you soon at the Pavilion. Come on Sunday, then we are very quiet, on Sunday come to dinner and see the young folks enjoy themselves. I've got a lot of young folks round me, and I like to watch them enjoy themselves. I shall introduce you myself to my family," he observed; "only send me word of your arrival."

And with this parting injunction he took his leave.

CHAPTER XLII

R.I.P.

"Now the soul goes home."

MARIA felt that she could not refuse the King's unwonted kindness; accordingly, on the Sunday evening she drove up to the at last completed building of which she was once the *châtelaine*. His Majesty came to meet her and hand her from the carriage, himself offering her his arm and presenting her to the family as one of themselves. "He ever afterwards," says Lord Stourton, "treated her in the same gracious manner."

In due time the executors of the late King, the Duke of Wellington and Sir William Knighton, met at the house of Mrs Fitzherbert in town, the Earl of Albemarle and Lord Stourton (whose intimate friendship with her can best be explained by stating that he married a Miss Weld), for the purpose of examining and destroying the great mass of papers concerning the late King that during all these long years had accumulated. The quantity can be imagined by a remark that the Duke in the course of these operations made to Lord Albemarle—"I think, my Lord," said he, "we had better hold our hands for a while, or we shall set the old woman's chimney afire."

This book does not purport to be other than a novel drawn from contemporary published history, yet here I should like to relate the following facts.

Certain papers (a list is given elsewhere) that were preserved under the express sanction of his Majesty, King William, for the vindication of Mrs Fitzherbert's character, were lodged at Coutts's Bank, the property of Mrs Fitz-

herbert, at the disposition of the Earl of Albemarle and Lord Stourton, not to be opened without the consent of the Duke of Wellington. The package is sealed by her two representatives, witnessed by the Duke and Sir William Knighton, and there they have been for nearly seventy years. On occasions when their production for their avowed purpose was vital, and for which the King himself expressly agreed they should be kept, the Duke of Wellington pooh-poohed *in toto* the idea of allowing the seals to be broken. Surely the time is past now, long enough for the character of this innocent woman to be thoroughly cleared. All the actors in the drama are dead and nearly all their immediate descendants. The vulgar curiosity that the publication of the papers might have excited in 1855, it is unlikely now would arise in these rapid days of manifold interest. There would be no scandal through their publication, only the stigma of being a "mistress," that is often attached to an innocent, unfortunate lady, would be removed, for many people still doubt that that illegal ceremony ever took place. It would be a chivalrous thing if these documents were now opened, so that the world might be convinced that "the most faultless, honourable, mistress that ever a prince had the good fortune to be attached to" was something more, that she was in truth, in fact, before God, if not before the law of England, his wife! Many a prince has had a good, pure, virtuous mistress such as might well have put to blush more than one respected wedded wife, were all known, but, as Maria was something more—why then not concede the fact? No harm can come of it—perhaps there would be good in righting this ancient wrong.

Come, young twentieth-century champions wishing to win your spurs, here is a cause as romantic as any budding Sir Lancelot can wish for, and as pure and just and noble as would satisfy the saintly King Arthur. If only some influential person would take it up in justice to her, in justice to him—for it is a matter that ought to be finally cleared.

She survived King George the Fourth seven years. She lived till the spring of the year that William died, and a new era dawned for England with the accession of young,

fresh, vigorous blood. The concluding years of her life were passed at Steyne House, Brighton, and there she died.

After the agitation in connection with destroying all the papers, she was ordered abroad. She left England for Aix-la-Chapelle in the autumn of '33. In a letter dated Paris, December 7, of that year, she says, "I went to Aix-la Chapelle; the waters did wonders, and I found my health so improved by the change of scene that I determined to pass my winter on the Continent somewhere in the south of France. But everything being in a state of confusion and uncertainty, I resolved to come here where everything is perfectly quiet. Should it be otherwise, it is so near England, that I might easily return, which I could not do if I were at a great distance."

In the following year, on October the 20th, we find her back at Brighton. She says, "The King sent for me a day or two after I got to London, nothing could be more kind than his reception, and he made me a very handsome present which he said he had had made purposely for me, but would not send it during my stay on the Continent."

I believe this relates to jewellery but I do not know.

I am nearing the end of my story. But few details are to hand. Mr Langdale says that she intended removing the packages from Coutts's. In support of this theory he quotes a letter to Lord Stourton in which she speaks of it. She was prevented by her somewhat sudden death. Concerning the twin miniatures, she asked King William to return her all papers, portraits and jewels that his brother had possessed of hers. She said that there were three portraits, but only two, of course, were forthcoming. However, but a little while before her death, the Duke of Wellington, hearing the third was inquired for, wrote to explain its ultimate fate. Her own miniature she gave to Mrs Damer, who, in turn, presented it to her second daughter, and it is now in the family into which this lady married.

"Minnie, come here, darling. Kneel down beside me, and lay your head on my shoulder—ah! you are a baby again. How like your face is to your poor mother—your real mother, I mean."

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"I have only one mother that seems real to me," contradicted Mrs Damer.

"As real as my daughter is to me, my darling—God's own blessing sent direct from heaven to be my all. *Minchen*, where is the Duke's letter, dear? Read it again." And as this was done, she said, "I'm glad that it was buried with him, child. I like to think that during all the long years my poor little likeness will lie on his breast. A sentimental fancy for an old woman, is it not? There was no one like him in all the world—no one. To you when you are with me I can speak, and it is such a relief, because to all the world and all my friends I must be silent. They listen in contempt, dear, and when I am gone they laugh at the poor old creature in her dotage. And my nearest, best friends heap foul calumny and slander on his dear memory—oh, I know, I have heard them—as though by it to please and propitiate me. Ring the bell, darling; tell them to bring the easel and the red portfolio from downstairs."

"I think you are better, dear," said Mrs Damer, throwing her an anxious and yet hopeful glance as she rose and obeyed.

Mrs Fitzherbert sat in an armchair by the fire. For several days she had been dangerously ill. That day, however, she had rallied somewhat and insisted upon getting up and going into the adjoining room for a change. It was a dismal March day. Even the sparkling fire within could not combat with the least success the colourless, lifeless, grey misery of the dusk that still stole silently in through the long windows that reached the ground.

Maria mused, gazing into the fire indifferently. She was aware of the comforting warmth—how old people love the fire!—then the servant lighted the candles and shrouded the staring windows, and brought in the heavy morocco case.

"It is here, mother," said Minnie.

"Shut and lock the door, then, my sweetheart; people would laugh at us."

So Minnie locked the door and opened the portfolio. It was full of prints and engravings, all representating one person, the individual Thackeray ironically calls "George

the Magnificent," in every possible position — standing, sitting, walking. Medallion heads, full face, side face, clear profile, three-quarter way—here he was a slim youth, there a corpulent, middle-aged man, resplendent in satin and lace, or as a dashing Hussar—this latter what was known as an equestrian portrait. His Highness in it was reining in a fiery steed that looked as though it came out of a circus, whilst he murderously flourished a rapier with the other hand and arm. In the background, very small (possibly on the same principle as the Pharaohs' wives are always represented as about the size of their husband's little finger) were other pigmy Hussars, and there was little dash about *them*. Apparently a heavy thunderstorm was taking place that it was to be thought would have had a lasting damaging effect on a large velvet curtain slung from a big oak tree that filled in entirely one side of the picture.

But the likeness was good — bold, *puissant*, haughtily reckless; it was the man to the life, as she remembered him some forty years before.

"Stop, Minnie!" she commanded, and Mrs Damer stepped back to view the engraving she had already placed on an easel.

"How handsome he is!" breathed the latter softly, to please the elder lady.

"It does not do him justice, fond as I am of it," declared Maria, stoutly. "No, I prefer my own miniature, that was painted expressly for me, best." She lifted from the table beside her a miniature he had given her and that she had had diamond-set to match her present to him so long before.

"*Minchen*, dearest, I want you to wear this always in the future in memory of me."

"If you wish so, dear." Mrs Damer came across and sat down on the floor at her feet. She took that old white hand in both her own. "Anything you order me, darling, I will do. I am so thankful you seem so much better to-night. You gave me an awful fright two days ago."

"I feel very contented to-night, dear."

"That portrait is dedicated to you," said Minnie.

"To me!"

"Yes. 'By special permission to her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales.'"

"Oh, hush, hush! You only grieve me when you talk like that, Minnie. It is vain and foolish. As I told the King when he offered to make me a Duchess, I have no wish for rank—not even from your dear lips, my child. Lord Stourton will defend me if ever it is really necessary, and except for that, why, let the matter die. When it pleases God to remove me, remember I wish you to put nothing on my tombstone to cause talk, just the name I have always borne."

"Do not speak about so dread a calamity, Mama, yet, when the time does come, I shall remember your wishes," said Mrs Damer, settling her head more comfortably against her friend's knee.

The crash of some miniature temple or falling of rock-work made visible by the fire god was the only sound to disturb them, save the soft purring of a big cat sitting on the arm of the chair opposite.

They had sat thus for some time when Minnie, chancing to turn her head, was horrified to see her guardian had fallen back in her chair and had quietly fainted. With a cry of dismay, she sprang to her feet and pealed the bell.

The maid, whose name was Dale, and other female servants hastily summoned, applied restoratives, and presently, after an anxious interval, they restored her to consciousness.

Mrs Dawson Damer was very frightened, and would have summoned the doctor, but her friend refused. "It is no good locking the stable door after the horse has fled, Minnie, dear. I shall not faint again—it was the heat."

"Still I think—"

"Oh, I don't want him"—wearily.

"Of course, as you wish, Mama."

"You are over-anxious, my dear."

Presently, after she had played with a little supper, she said she would go to her room, but vetoed anyone sitting up with her. "I am sure I could not sleep with anyone watching me." Before undressing, she dismissed Minnie. "Good-night, my daughter, you have always been a blessing to me since that day you were left a baby in my arms."

"Good-night, Mama. As you will have no one to sit up with you, would you like me to sleep with you?"

"No, love, I think not—I shall be all right. Go now, dear, your husband, your children want you. God bless you always." Then, as the door closed, "Undress me quickly, Dale, I feel so tired all of a sudden." Deftly and swiftly the woman obeyed.

"You may go, Dale."

"There is nothing further I can do for you, Madam? Shall I wait until you are in bed?"

"No, thank you."

"Good-night, Madam."

"Good-night, Dale."

She stood in the middle of the room, in her fleecy, white dressing-gown, and looked around her almost dazed. There was the bed neatly turned open on one side, there was a small table beside it with a clean handkerchief, some eau-de-Cologne, a bottle of cold water, and other things that she might require, placed by Dale. Her clothes were all laid neatly away. A sudden sick faintness seized her, and she sat down on the nearest chair, clinging to its back. A cold perspiration broke out on her forehead. She never thought of summoning assistance as she sat there battling with the feeling, which after a few moments subsided, but when she rose to her feet she felt strangely weak and giddy. By holding on to the furniture, she reached the bedside at last, and, divesting herself of her gown, clambered slowly and heavily in. As she stretched out her hand to extinguish the candle, something else she touched rattled. It was the diamond-set miniature that she had brought from the other room with her, and the chain was entangled with that of her rosary. So in the darkness she drew them both together towards her, and shoved it all inextricably mixed into the breast of her gown. The sick feeling had passed, and she felt contentedly happy as she lay, reviewing, strangely enough, the days of her early girlhood, when she would watch for hours the cool wind whip and ripple playfully the blue stretch of Southampton Water. She was hand in hand again with her girl love, Edward Weld—in the days when she thought to become Mrs

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Weld of Lulworth Castle to be the finest thing in the world. The memory was but a transitory one, and she was by the murmur of other water, and another boy, gay and light-hearted as the first, was reading *Minna von Barnhelm* in flowing, melodious German. She could see the water dancing, and the sunlight kissing his glossy bent head uncertainly, as he lay at her feet. She turned on her side towards the door and stretched out her arm, so that the hand lay open and inviting on the coverlet. Time after time had she fallen asleep like this, tired out with waiting for that gay young Prince, ever the last to leave any entertainment at which he was well amused. This night the action was mechanically unconscious. Presently she slept, with a steady, regular breathing, and after a while came dreams, and she was in the cold, damp passage King William was threatening to have blocked up—flying to keep her tryst with his Royal brother. As is often the case in a dream, she knew what was coming, and was astounded to find that the door, contrary to her expectations, opened, as did the next and the next. She hurried on now still quicker, burning to reach the yearned-for goal. But suddenly she felt a great weight on her chest, there was a loud hissing in her ears and a flash of strange light in her eyes. She opened them to peer, startled, into the darkness. In her imagination, something moved beside the bed.

"George!" she exclaimed in glad surprise. "Have you come at last, dear? How late you are." The end was almost inaudible, her head sank again, and the fingers of her outstretched hand curled as though closing over something. "At last," she repeated, with a faint murmur. She took a long, struggling, painful breath, and the rosary and miniature, warm in her breast, rattled. Her free hand groped feebly for him, but she had not the energy, and abandoned the effort. A little choking cry broke from her: "Is it so? Heart, heart! At *last!* Jesu! Mercy! Lady! Help!"

I have finished.

Alone she lived, alone she died. One of the most injured, innocent women whose life has been made a misery by the unjust condemnation of an evil-minded world.

In the Shadow of the Purple

I have finished. My story is told. What need to detail at length the costly funeral, with all its pomp and pageantry, that left Steyne House on April 6, and wound across by the new road, past the statue of the King that heeded not; or to speak of Mrs Damer's grief chastened by expectation.

In the Church of St John the Baptist that lady afterwards reared a monument to her friend's memory. It can be seen now any time, for the cool, quiet church is open all day.

IN THE VAULT NEAR THIS SPOT ARE DEPOSITED

THE REMAINS OF

MARIA FITZHERBERT

She was born on the XXVI. of July MDCCLVI., and expired at Brighton on the XXVII. of March MDCCCXXXVII. One to whom she was more than a parent has placed this monument to her Revered and Beloved Memory as an humble though feeble tribute of her everlasting gratitude and affection.

R. I. P.

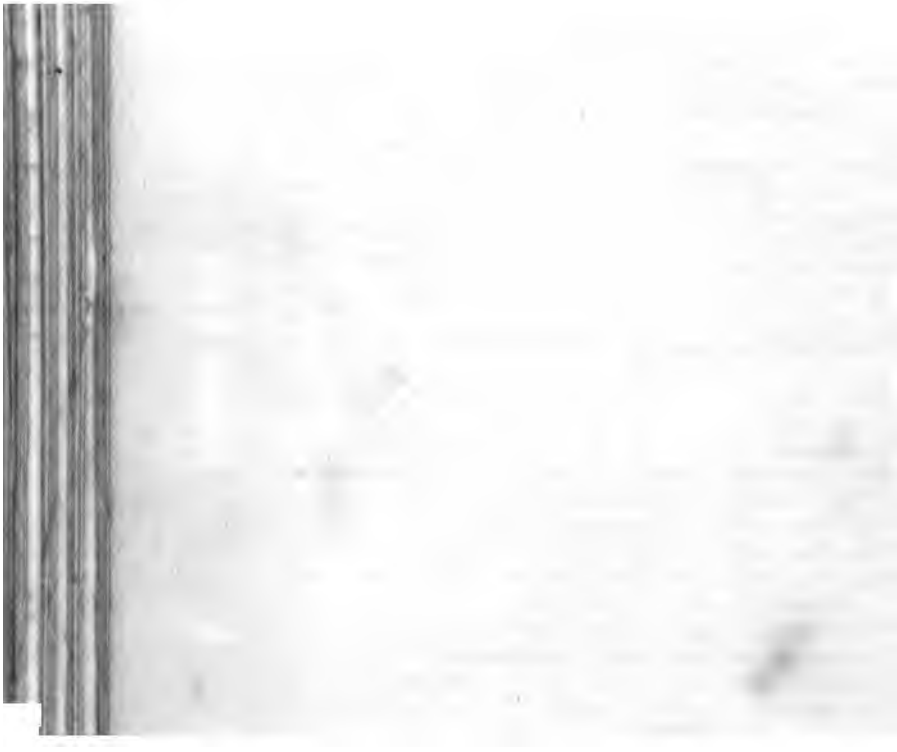
But although she had promised to put nothing on the tombstone that could possibly hint at the romantic engagement her guardian had contracted with a certain August Person, Mrs Damer felt that she must give some hint of the honourable relationship, and so on the hand of the veiled mourning figure carved at the top, she caused to be placed a triple ring. A wedding-ring for each marriage!

And in the shadow of the grey old pile of Windsor, lulled monotonously by England's sweetest river, where the blue mist, like incense, rises and it is always placid and stately, the King takes his Royal rest. And she whose love was greater has her requiem everlastingly sung by something grander and far more majestic, and this it seems should be so, the passionate, unceasing voice of the Great Sea.

Fashion moves westward, times are altered. The Steyne is deserted and forgotten now; no one goes there save an

occasional nursemaid or a pedantic old fossil like myself. There are none who take heed of the romantic glamour of other days that seems to hang around it yet, any more than they notice in the winter the hoarse cawing of George's favourite rooks that are still the same—still unchanged. The bronze statue of him is there still in the centre of the Steyne, manly, regal, imposing; from the *débonnaire* air the likeness is convincing, and that and Mrs Damer's monument are the most interesting relics in the town. Lately, St John's has apparently been redecorated, and round the walls are pious ejaculations to influential Saints. By accident or design—and one likes to think some kindly soul knows her story and it is the latter, for I think it would have pleased her, the one nearest the monument runs—"*Sancte Georgi, ora pro nobis.*"

And through the tree-tops and over the heads of the heedless passers-by—tradesfolk, children, natives and a stray visitor—the Man of Bronze stares fixedly, intently, with hand outstretched, winter and summer, to the house he reared for her nearly a hundred years ago.



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   (1) Louise Mary, married Sir Frederick Hervey Bathurst, d. 30th December 1846.
   (2) Charlotte Georgina Hariott, b. 1815, m., 23rd December 1833, Hon. George Augustus Craven (he died in the spring of 1837).
2. John, married widow of Captain Strickland.
3. Charles.
4. Henry.

1. Mary Anne, b. 26th July 1756, m. (first), in July 1775, Thomas Weld, of Lulworth Castle, Dorset (he died that year); (second), 1778, Thomas Fitzherbert, of Norbury, Derbyshire (Swinnerton Park, Staffordshire), he died in May 1781. She died at Brighton, 27th March 1837.
2. Frances, m. Sir Carraby Haggerston.

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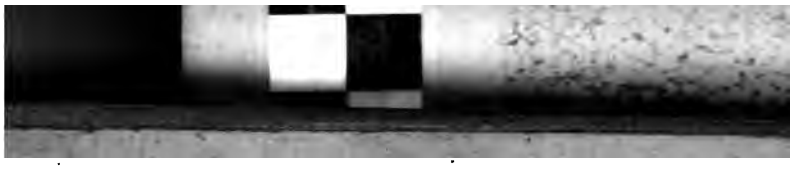
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